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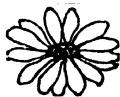
THE
RAMAYANA
OF
VALMEEKI

RENDERED INTO ENGLISH PROSE
WITH EXHAUSTIVE NOTES

BY

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ARANYAKANDA



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ARANYAKANDA

FOREWORD

THE previous canto describes the nature of Brahman as the cause of the universe ; He is the goal of all knowledge ; He is absolutely untouched by nescience ; He is the Inner Ruler of all ; of unbounded radiance and glory, He is, the restorer of Law and Dharma. The present canto emphasises his attribute of standing between the righteous and everything that bars their way to perfection. Or, the previous canto instructs us in the truth that a reverent obedience to the behests of the father was the dharma practised by the good and great ; the present canto emphasises the dharma of championing the good and the righteous.

CHAPTER I.

RAMA MAKES A TOUR THROUGH THE ASRAMAS.

THEN, Rama entered another part of the forest that was of yore the flourishing kingdom of Dandaka, the king, cursed by Sukra to be a howling wilderness. The terrible forest caused him not the slightest fear ; for, the Lord and support of

all things can be harmed or disturbed by none of his creatures. They travelled for a while and came upon
 10 the groups of hermitages. Around them lay bundles of the sacred kusa grass for sacrificial purposes; robes of bark were hung up to dry; the place was bathed in a calm lustre and glory engendered of the chanting and study of the vedic hymns and a devout and con-
 15 scientious practice thereof. The Mandehas, a clan of rakshasas, attack the sun when he raises and sets; but they dare not approach him at midday when he shines in all his radiance and majesty. Even so, the rakshasas carefully avoided the holy spot where these
 20 mighty sages dwelt. Fierce beasts of prey, foes by nature since the dawn of creation, laid aside their cruel instincts and abode there in harmony and peace; in fact, it was the well-known refuge and resort of all creatures that were afraid of the rakshasas. Clean and neat
 25 within and without, the cottages were filled with the joyful sounds of happy beasts and birds. It was one of the loveliest spots on earth and the devas frequented it to enjoy its beauties; and naturally the apsarasas held it in great reverence and often danced and
 30 disported themselves therein. Spacious fire-chambers, curious sacrificial vessels, deer-skins, kusa grass to spread on the floors and altars, sacred fuel, water-pots, fruits, flowers and roots met the eye in graceful confusion. Sacred trees grew thick all around, bending
 35 under their glad tribute of flowers and fruits. Sanctified with such holy rites as agnihotra, vaisvadeva and aupasana, it resounded with the solemn vedic chaunts, while flowers of rare beauty and perfume adorned the altars; here and there sheets of crystal water gleamed
 40 through the trees as the morning sun gently kissed the sleeping eyes of his favourite lotuses.

Many a hermit dwelt there and many a sage, fruits and roots their only fare, deerskin and dress of bark their only wear. They carried their load of years lightly ; some shone like the sun and some like the blazing fire. Other maharshis were there, of indescribable might and holiness, and held in reverence by all. Like the world of Brahma, it was ever filled with sacrificial chaunts and hymns and was illuminated by the presence and radiance of brahmanas of unspeakable power and wisdom. 45 50

Rama feasted his eyes with the beauty and loveliness of the place and loosened the string of his bow that he might not disturb or frighten the birds and beasts that ranged over the place. The maharshis saw with their unclouded eye of spirit the Lord of all who came down into the world in mortal guise to rid it of Ravana and his unhely brood of rakshasas ; the Mother of Mercy came down with him, ever inseparable, as Seeta ; Lakshmana belonged to his hierarchy and partook of his nature and essence. Rama is the eternal Brahman, the Means and the Goal. So, they welcomed the party with hearts dancing with joy. Even as the radiant moon ascends her throne on high to chase away darkness and its terrors, Rama came down among men in response to the cry of Mother Earth sinking under the burden of sin and wickedness. Even as the moon in her full-orbed glory, he infused joy and delight into the hearts of those that beheld him. He passed through the dark forest like the moon through dark cloud banks. He was the Goal they sought to reach through their tapas, worship, offerings, meditation and study of the Holy Books. They had till then enjoyed the bliss of his Presence through the eye of spirit ; now they had the privilege and happiness to behold him with the eye 60 65 70 75

of flesh, the supreme Vasudeva. Their hearts were wrung with pity and apprehension as they said to themselves "These great Ones, what misery and torture for them to toil through these pathless dreadful woods!"

80 They showered potent blessings upon their heads, to ward off evil and danger from them. He was their champion and protector and their hearts ever turned to him with love and devotion.

Their lives were spent in the lonely forests; ever
 85 centred in tapas and meditation, nothing could disturb the serenity of their hearts; yet, they could not take their eyes off the radiant form of Rama as he dawned upon their sight with his faultless symmetry of feature and limb, the witching glory that played about him, the
 90 delicate softness of blown blossoms, the gleam and the sheen of perfect pearls giving back rays of light. Men, animals, birds and fowls that inhabited the Dandaka had a rare feast of it to behold Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta of unparalleled beauty and glory, and said to them-
 95 selves "The Lord of all, far beyond the reach of Brahma and the devas, deigns to come down on earth and seek us where we abide, like the holy waters of the Ganga rolling towards the spot where lies the helpless cripple." They could not take their eyes off him, in
 100 their eagerness to drink of his supernal and enchanting beauty. The thrice-fortunate rishis lodged Rama and his party in a lovely cottage; no wonder that the Father of all receives a warm welcome from his children.

They made kind enquiries of welfare and honored
 105 them with due rites of hospitality. The welcome offered by the sages, resplendent as the lord of fire in his glory, was but the fruit of their long and faithful observance of dharma. Ah! what untold merit did they lay up in past births! "Rama!" exclaimed they "blessed are we

beyond compare in that it is given to us to behold you, 110
the Supreme Person. Our happiness and fortune are
verily indescribable." They furnished the royal guests
with fruits, roots and other woodland fare. They were
perfectly conversant with their duty as servants to the
supreme Lord and were permeated with the spirit of 115
devotion engendered of a clear vision of his real nature.
They laid themselves at his feet and with clasped hands
exclaimed " Rama ! You are the Beginning and the End;
you are the upholder of the duties of castes and orders ;
you are the sole refuge and shelter of such hermits as 120
ourselves who groan under oppression and fear ; you
deserve best our heart's adoration in that you are the
Supreme deity ; you deserve our welcome and respect
as our king and ruler ; in you lies the right and the
power to protect the innocent and punish the guilty ; 125
you are the Eye of spirit and the light of truth to your
people in that you lead them towards the highest good.
The king governs his subjects infused with a fourth of
the might of Indra and the other Regents of the quarters ;
hence he deserves the worship and obedience of the 130
world and the enjoyment of the pleasures it contains.
Now, those regents hold their life and power from *you*.
If mortal kings are so great and mighty, it is no wonder
that you are the champion of dharma and the refuge
of the oppressed ; verily, it becomes you as the lord of 135
all that has come down to save the worlds. Now, our
misery is something that baffles description and it be-
hoves you to free us from it as you have dedicated your-
self to the work. Ask not ' Do you desire it as the
•result of your meditation upon and efforts to reach me ? ' 140
No ; it is a dangerous path where the slightest slip may
ruin all. Hence, we seek your protection on the sole
strength of our residing in your dominions ; it is utterly

of flesh, the supreme Vasudeva. Their hearts were wrung with pity and apprehension as they said to themselves "These great Ones, what misery and torture for them to toil through these pathless dreadful woods!"

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as our king and ruler ; in you lies the right and the
power to protect the innocent and punish the guilty ; 125
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hence he deserves the worship and obedience of the 130
world and the enjoyment of the pleasures it contains.
Now, those regents hold their life and power from *you*.
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that you are the champion of dharma and the refuge
of the oppressed ; verily, it becomes you as the lord of 135
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self to the work. Ask not ' Do you desire it as the
•result of your meditation upon and efforts to reach me ? ' 140
No ; it is a dangerous path where the slightest slip may
ruin all. Hence, we seek your protection on the sole
strength of our residing in your dominions ; it is utterly

impossible to falter on this path. Say not 'Be it so ;
 145 I will attend to it when my exile is over and I go back
 to Ayodhya'. You are our king, our protector on the
 throne or in the woods. We cannot think of you apart
 from your omnipotence ; you are beyond all limitations,
 the lord of all. Sole repository of infinite perfections !
 150 Keep away from us the rakshasas that stand between
 us and the bliss of meditating upon your world-entranc-
 ing beauty. Other kings there are who have enough
 to do to protect their subjects through might of intellect
 and strength of armies ; but, you, the protector of the
 155 worlds, the Hero of unapproachable valor, are never
 more powerful in your capital or less so in the forest.
 Say not 'Your yogic powers can do this for you more
 easily'. We are vowed to a life of tapas and have con-
 quered the wrath that ruins it. Our senses are under
 160 perfect restraint ; hence, we have it not in us to curse
 these rakshasas. Again, we are right in not taking it
 upon ourselves ; because as we have surrendered our-
 selves entirely to you and have no will or act apart
 from yours. We have no right to defend ourselves even
 165 if we can ; we have but to lay ourselves at your feet for
 good and for evil. Again, are we not among your sub-
 jects ? Have we any other refuge ? 'How have you
 deserved my protection ?' you may ask. Prapatti (sur-
 render) is our only wealth, our only tribute to you ; and
 170 receiving it from us, you are bound to protect us in
 as return."

Then, they entertained their honored guests with
 fruits, roots, flowers and other woodland products as
 became the servants of the Lord. Others were there
 175 who had walked through the various paths that lead to
 perfection. Of regulated diet, they engaged themselves
 only in such acts as were consistent with their level

and their hearts turned away from the opposite. These were too feeble in body to serve Rama otherwise than approach him with praise, reverence and salutation. 180

CHAPTER II.

VIRADHA.

THE Lord accepted, with supreme delight, the welcome offered him by the sages of pure and unselfish hearts; and at day-break he finished his morning orisons, took leave of his hosts and plunged into the trackless wilds. Deer, tigers, leopards and panthers ranged there fearless. Later, they came upon trees, creepers and tanks ruined. Broken trees, torn creepers and crumbling water-courses testified to the passage of Viradha the rakshasa that way, with his body hard as adamant. Birds flew high or low in those parts, but through fear of him were voiceless and dispirited. Alone the crickets chirped merrily, being too insignificant to be noticed. 15

The brothers threaded their way through this terrible forest, teeming with fierce beasts of prey, when they came upon a cannibal of a rakshasa. Huge of body even as a mountain; with a terrible voice that took the life and spirit out of all that heard it; with big eyes like cart-wheels; ever open-mouthed like the huge fortress-gates of a capital, he was fearful to behold. Ugly and deformed, inordinately tall, he was a disgusting sight, as, wrapped in a tiger-skin smeared with blood and fat, he ran at them with fearful intent like the god of Death bearing down upon his poor unfortunate victims with yawning mouth and hanging tongue. From a huge trident on his shoulder there hung three 25

lions, four tigers, two wolves, ten deer and an elephant's
30 head with the tusks.

The sight of men roused him to ungovernable fury ;
like Yama at the time of universal dissolution, he
gave a dreadful cry and shook the earth with his
tread as he ran at them ; snatching up Seeta, he roared
35 out to the princes " In hermit's guise you, decked with
dress of bark, deer-skin and matted coils, what have
you to do with bow and arrows, sword and shield ? Nice
anchorites you are that drag a woman in tow ! Let be.
Who are you that keep a woman in common ? You have
40 come within my grasp but to be wiped out of existence,
you who disgrace and insult the hermit's dharma—
wolves in sheep's clothing ? Miserable sinners ! they that
come into this forest of Dandaka go not back to tell their
tale. Here do I lord it over man and beast. Viradha
45 I call myself and it pleases me to range through these
woods, taking my fill of the flesh of the hermits and
recluses herein. This girl is fair enough, I ween, to be
my bride. I will have a fight with you and at the
end of it, drink your heart's blood with pleasure. ° You
50 are the most abandoned sinners I have ever seen."

Seeta trembled in affright, like a tender plantain in
the grip of a fierce gale, when the terrible roar of the
fierce man-eater fell on her ears. Rama's face grew
black with rage and grief as he beheld the wife of his
55 heart perched on the hip of the rakshasa and cried
to his brother " Lakshmana ! see you the miserable
plight of Seeta ? The fond daughter of king Janaka, *my*
wife, of pure and unsullied life, brought up in the lap of
luxury and comfort, a princess by birth, of unparalleled
60 fame—see her in the grasp of yon low thief of a
rakshasa. Verily Kaikeyi may this day rejoice in the
success of her devilish machinations, towards which

she deceived Dasaratha into granting her the accursed boons. She sees far into the future. Why did she not limit her request to securing the crown for Bharata? 65 She would not rest until she had driven me to the dreary forest, I, the friend and benefactor of all beings. For, Seeta will not fail to accompany me here; some rakshasa or other is sure to abduct her; I will not survive it; then, Bharata will be secured in the possession 70 of the throne without a care. And has she not worked her sweet will upon us all, even to the uttermost? I have to thank her for my father's miserable death; I have to thank her for being driven out of my inheritance; I have to thank her for a low thief laying violent 75 hands upon my wedded wife. But, this latest visitation pains me infinitely more than the others." And he sobbed aloud with streaming eyes.

Lakshmana could not bear to behold his brother suffering the pangs of poignant grief; like a royal cobra 80 bound by the potent spells of the charmer, he hissed forth "Brother mine! it becomes you not; it is all unjust of you to grieve thus like a waif when you are the supreme Lord of men and gods and all creation. 85 Am I not your willing slave to carry out your least behests? Yon rakshasa is but poor meat for my sharp anger and sharper shafts. The parched earth gapes to drink its fill of his blood. Indra of yore launched his bolt at the refractory mountains; and I will even make this Viradha a temporary substitute for the wicked 90 Bharata whose heart is filled with unholy longings for the crown that is yours. Here do I send this dart drawn to the ear, with the full force of my arm behind it, enjoining it to bring down the huge head of this monster. The life-breaths will escape from his carcass 95 and it will reel and topple to the earth."

CHAPTER III.

RAMA AND VIRADHA.

MEANWHILE the rakshasa roared at them again,
 5 “Give me some news of yourselves. Who are
 you? Whither are you bound?” And to him
 of a flaming face replied Rama all sweetly “We be
 sons of Dasaratha the emperor and have his orders
 to dwell here. Kshatriyas by birth, our feet stray not
 from the dharma of our order. At present we live the
 10 life of hermits. But who are you that roam these
 lonely forests?” Thereat the monster thundered
 forth “I am the son of Jaya and Satahrada; the rak-
 shasas all the world over call me Viradha. My hard
 tapas found favour with Brahma and got me the boon
 15 of utter invulnerability from any weapon whatever.
 Leave this girl with me and seek to put miles between
 this place and yourselves. You will buy your lives
 from me cheap at that. Begone ere my mood changes.”
 Fire flashed from the eyes of Rama as he replied “Base
 20 thief! fie upon you. You but entreated and welcomed
 your death when your heart turned towards this lady,
 the noblest of her kind. Verily you will have your re-
 ward; but I am sorry that you will be disappointed in
 your hope of surviving this meeting. Nay, flee not;
 25 stay and face the music”. He strung his bow and shot
 at him many a shaft, keen and terrible.

Of matchless might and speed like unto Garuda,
 the lord of birds and Vayu, the lord of air, they were
 adorned with golden bands and peacock feathers. They
 30 pierced him deep and fell around smeared with his blood,
 consuming the grass and shrubs thereabouts. The
 giant seemed to be sore-stricken; he let Seeta down

and ran at the princes in senseless fury, with his huge trident raised aloft. More like Yama, the god of Death as he rushes on with open mouth to swallow the 35 entire creation on the last Day, looked Viradha as, with a deafening roar, he ran at them with his uncouth weapon that towered above him like an Indradhwaja. Now that Seeta was not there upon him, the princes had a free hand to pour at him a steady shower of 40 arrows. He but laughed like thunder and stretched his limbs as if he was coming out of a long and refreshing slumber; and lo! the darts dropped down from his body, every one of them. Then, the rakshasa drew his vital airs into his heart, thanks to the boon of Brahma, 45 and sprang at them with his trident. Two arrows did Rama despatch to meet it as it flamed aloft in his hands and it dropped to the earth in two, like a huge peak of Meru broken by the vajra of Indra. At once, their swords flashed from their sheaths like black cobras, as 50 they sprang upon him. He essayed to catch them alive and bear them away as captives. Verily it was a sight to behold the huge monster striving with might and main to move the young and delicate-limbed princes. Rama caught at his meaning and said to his brother 55 "Let be. He does well to carry us away; it but saves us a long trudge." Viradha put forth all his strength, lifted them aloft on his mighty shoulders even as if they were babes of a month and dived into the forests emitting fearful roars. Like the Lords of day and 60 night hid behind the black curtain of rain-charged clouds, the princes were swallowed up in the dark woods where birds and beasts, strange and fierce, darted through the trees that pierced into the sky.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DEATH OF VIRADHA.

T
 HEREAT Seeta raised her hands in despair and wailed aloud in the grief of her heart: "Yon Rama, the son of the emperor Dasaratha, is ever wedded to Truth, of lofty ideals, candid, open-hearted. But lo! the dreadful rakshasa carries him and his brother away with none to prevent him. Fie upon that which is proclaimed as the lord and protector of the
 10 worlds." She turned to Viradha and cried "Noblest of rakshasas! pray accept my humble respects. It is unjust of you to leave me here to the mercy of leopards, panthers, tigers and wolves; best take me away in the place of yon princes." Her words decided Rama and his
 15 brother and, with a stroke of their keen swords, they hewed down the mighty arms of the rakshasa. Terror-struck, Viradha fell to the ground like a huge cloud-bank or a mountain shattered by the vajra of Indra. The princes spared him not but kicked, struck and buffeted
 20 him with their hands and feet; they whirled him aloft, dashed him against the earth, trampled upon him and did their very best to squeeze the life out of him. Riven with arrows, hacked with swords, dashed upon the earth again and again, the rakshasa *would* not die.
 25 Thereat, He whom all beings take refuge in when danger and sorrow afflict them, said to his brother "It is the might of his tapas that keeps him immune from death by weapons; let us bury him."

Meantime, the rakshasa cast away from him the
 30 dark veil of ignorance that clouded his eye of spirit, thanks to his contact with the Fountain of light and

wisdom, saw clear into the nature and mission of the Lord of the worlds before him and cried "Fie upon me, who, steeped in ignorance, failed to see that you are the Supreme One come down upon earth as Rama to 35 relieve her of her load of sin. Blessed am I in that I meet my death at your hands, whose might the great Indra himself can scarce conceive. Bright embodiment of Kausalya's rare merit in her past births! father of the countless worlds! do I not see that yon lady Janaki 40 is no other than the Mother of Mercy, Mahalakshmi? And Lakshmana here, who crowns himself with undying fame in your service, is he not a part of yourself, of your own essence? This hideous rakshasa body is the result of a dread curse. Tumburn the gandharva am I, 45 who, once disporting myself with Rambha, the apsaras, failed to notice the approach of my master Kubera and reverence him as he deserved. Incensed thereat, he cursed me to be a rakshasa. Terror gripped my heart and I entreated to be forgiven my heinous offence; 50 thereat, his rage abated somewhat and he was pleased to say 'Rama, the son of Dasaratha, would slay you in battle and restore you to your former self and abode.' Rama! prince of heroes! all good go with you. A yojana and a half from here there lives a 55 maharshi by name Sarabhanga, radiant as the sun. It behoves you to bless him with your presence before the righteous One of unparalleled fame enters the blazing fire. He waits to render you a very important service. Rakshasas are raised to the worlds of light if their car- 60 casses are buried. So, do me the favour to inter mine before you go." Rama thereupon directed Lakshmana to dig a vast pit wherein to throw the body of Viradha huge as an elephant and stood upon his throat the while. Then, they dashed him upon the ground once 65

more and threw him into the pit, he howling dreadfully all the time.

They knew that death shunned him in any other guise, by keen shaft or keener sword. On his part, the
 70 giant deliberately and gladly sought his death at the hands of Rama and laid violent hands upon them but to provoke them thereto. They caught at his voluntary confession that weapons slew him not and decided to bury him. The woods quaked in affright as they did so.
 75 They laid huge rocks upon him and proceeded through the forest with happy hearts like the Lords of day and night sailing through a cloudy sky.

CHAPTER V.

THE PASSING AWAY OF SARABHANGA.

THE mighty Viradha was killed and Rama warmly embraced Janaki to chase away the fear, sorrow and shame of her having been violently carried away by the giant. He turned to his brother and said "Verily this wood is no fit abode for us; it is rather too full of perils and dangers. So, let us seek the asrama of Sarabhanga, the maharshi." As
 10 they drew near, they had occasion to observe a very wonderful thing that was taking place at the hermitage of the holy One, mightier than gods and for whom Brahman had no mysteries. Some glorious Being resplendent as the sun and the other lords of light massed together,
 15 descended from his car and stood without touching the ground. Bright ornaments and pure garments adorned his person. Many other glorious forms like unto himself waited upon him. His car drawn by black horses stood aloft in the sky even as the rising sun. Over his

head there outspread a snow-white umbrella like pale 20
clouds or the orb of the autumn moon, adorned with
beautifully worked garlands, fringes and tassels.
Heavenly nymphs stood behind him waving golden-
handled chamaras, while gandharvas, siddhas, devas
and maharshis sang his praises. 25

As Indra was thus conversing with Sarabhanga,
Rama said to his brother, "Mark you that car, as it
shines aloft in the sky like the noon-day sun. Those
horses resemble those that are yoked to the car of Indra.
Note the glorious beings that stand around him in arms 30
and are decorated with ear-rings, garlands of blazing
lustre and garments of a deep red. Of broad and mighty
shoulders, they seem to be youths of twenty-five with
the strength and prowess of tigers. I know that the
devas never go beyond this age. There that glorious 35
One has got into his car. Stay here with Seeta while I
go and ascertain who that resplendent Being might be."
But Lakshmana would follow him, loath to remain be-
hind; whereat Rama directed him once again to wait
for a minute and took his way to the asrama. 40

Indra noticed him coming and whispered to the
sage "I may not meet and speak to Rama before he has
accomplished his mission; else, I would but reveal his
divine nature. He has taken this mortal form to com-
pass a mighty purpose impossible for others. I will see 45
him only after Ravana is laid low and the devas rejoice
in the glad fulfilment of their hopes." He took leave
of the sage with reverend salutations and coursed back
to his abode on high.

The royal youths and Seeta sought the presence 50
of Sarabhanga where he sat in his fire-chamber, laid
their heads at his feet and received a warm welcome.
Seated in comfort, Rama enquired of the rishi, the

purpose of Indra's visit, to which he replied, "It is by
 55 the command of Brahma that Indra, the dispenser of all
 good, came to lead me to the Satyaloka. 'Why did I not
 go? You were on your way here, an unlooked-for good
 fortune to one who had till now but worshipped you in
 his heart of hearts. Surely the worlds of Brahma must
 60 have some mightier attraction for me to make me forego
 the pleasure of a visit from such an honoured and loved
 guest, to outweigh the bliss of beholding your supernal
 beauty. Would you know what regions I ascend to and
 by what means? I have found favour in your eyes, you
 65 the embodiment of dharma and of unfailing resolve; and
 I may not reach a lower level than Vaikuntha, far above
 the world of Brahma, the happy abode of the Lord's
 elect, where He shines in his boundless radiance and
 majesty. 'Let it come in its turn. Exhaust now the
 70 results of your meritorious past.' Nay, receive from
 me in glad gift, the worlds of light and bliss that are
 mine in Indraloka and BrahmaloKa."

Rama, the soul of wisdom, heard him out and
 said "Holy One! I am a kshatriya and may not
 75 accept a gift at the hands of others. Be it mine to
 acquire those worlds for myself. I pray you select
 for us a likely spot in these woods to dwell in peace
 and quiet."

The sage saw with his eye of spirit the death of
 80 Mareecha that was to happen later and replied "Not
 far from here lives a holy man by name Suteekshna.
 Go to him and he will assist you in selecting a pure
 and lovely spot for your abode. Follow west the banks
 of this Mandakini whose waters are hid by the flowers
 85 floating upon it and it will take you to the place. 'Now,
 Lord and support of the infinite worlds! I lay aside this
 tenement of matter as a snake sheds its slough. I pray

you to bless me till then with your sweet and compassionate looks."

He lit the sacred fire, pronounced the mantras 90 prescribed for the funeral obsequies of a knower of Brahman and offered libations of ghee into it. Thereafter he entered the blazing fire which consumed the skin, bones, flesh, blood and hair. From the altar he rose aloft, a glorious being resplendent as the Lord of fire, in 95 the guise of a youth of thirty. Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta marvelled at the wondrous sight. On, on he passed, through the worlds where rule the Lords of the day, the bright fortnight, the northern half of the year, the year, the sun, the moon and lightning, to where a 100 Form of light waited to lead him to the presence of Brahman. Thus did he course through the worlds where dwell the agnihotrans, rishis and devas, reach the worlds on high through his sterling merit and stood before the throne of the Supreme One who shines there in his 105 majesty and glory, Lakshmi by his side, the conch and the discus gracing his mighty arms, while the Elect await his commands. A warm welcome and loving he did receive from the Father of all.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RISHIS TAKE REFUGE WITH RAMA.

THEN the sages that lived thereabouts said to themselves "The self-resplendent Brahman has come down to take birth among the Iksh- 5 wakus and has sought us even in our wild homes, thanks to the merit laid up in our past lives. Now can we declare with truth that our tapas, charity and other righteous acts have born good fruit. Let us

10 seek his presence and desire no more." Like a miserable beggar all his life who stumbles upon the Nine Treasures, they could not contain their joy and flocked to him from all quarters. Vaikhanasas that were born from the nails of the Lord, Valakhilyas that sprang from
 15 his tail, Samprakshalas that ever cleanse their bodies with water, Mareechipas that drink of the rays of the sun and the moon, Asmakuttas who strike their bodies with hard slabs, hermits that live upon leaves and recluses that eat of grains of corn which their teeth help them
 20 to hull, hastened along with others who ever stand up to their necks in water. Others too were there who ever sleep with their heads resting on their breasts or shoulders, who deny themselves sleep and stand erect and rigid day and night; some lie exposed to wind and
 25 rain, heat and cold; some live upon water, others upon air; some perch themselves on the tops of trees, others take their seats on *kusa* grass spread on the ground; some observe a perpetual fast, engaging themselves with vows and penances; some are clad in ever-dripping
 30 garments; some are ever reciting mantras, others ever repeating vedic texts; some perform severe tapas, surrounding themselves in summer with five fires. They shone with Bramhic lustre, engendered of the practice of the sacred science of Brahman; they had
 35 trod the various steps of the eightfold paths of yoga and had mastered the secret of concentrating their powers.

To Rama they came, who was an adept in the mysteries of dharma and stood foremost amongst those that
 40 practised them; they knew well that they had no other refuge from the terrible persecutions of the rakshasas and that Sree Ramachandra, who incarnated to protect the world, was the sole shelter and support of all beings;

and they poured forth their griefs and sorrows to him in well-chosen words to rouse his compassion. “ Rama! 45 best of heroes! Indra is the lord and protector of the devas; are you not the best of the Ikshwakus, the noblest ornament of the line of Raghu? Are you not the legitimate lord of this earth? Nay, are you not the support and nourisher of all creation? You have secured 50 unparalleled fame as a hero through all the worlds, as the destroyer of Viradha and the giver of immortal life to Sarabhanga. The ruler of infinite worlds, yet you have chosen to be born as a kshatriya and live the dharma of one. In you reside the noble qualities of 55 filial devotion, in that you renounced the crown that your father gave you of his own accord; truth, in that you held to your promise and would not listen to the piteous appeals of Bharata; and championship of the good and the holy, in that you raised Sarabhanga to the 60 immortal worlds. You are the soul of virtue; you know best the dharma of protecting those that take refuge in you; you practise it to the full. All beings are drawn to you by an irresistible charm; we are here to beg of you a favour and submit it as best as we could. 65 Forgive us this indiscretion; our purpose would be served best by simply taking refuge in your mercy. The wise have it that it is enough if suppliants betake themselves to the presence of great Ones. Well do we know the rule that your children need not pray anything of you, 70 but should rest content in the assurance of your omniscience, compassion and omnipotence. You have come down to save the world and we are of it. But our miseries goad us on to voice it forth like men of the world and we pray you forgive us this lapse. 75

“ It comes to you as your natural duty to secure peace and happiness to the inhabitants of your kingdom,

A load of sin rests on his shoulders who takes from his subjects one-sixth of their belongings but protects
 80 them not as the very children of his loins. Boundless fame to the end of time crowns him who seeks the welfare of his people with unflagging care and zeal, as he would of his life and of his children dearer to him than life. The world of Brahma and a warm welcome from
 85 its lord await him after death. But we hermits and recluses pay you no tribute ; then, it serves no purpose to exert yourself on our behalf ? Nay, not so ; for, the righteous king secures to himself a fourth of the supreme merit laid up by the hermit through his strict diet
 90 and stricter tapas. You stand unique among the rulers of the world and work for the welfare of your subjects with utter unselfishness. To take refuge in you is the best passport to your heart.

“The hermits hereabouts are mostly brāhmanas and
 95 you are their legitimate king and protector ; yet, they are destroyed by the rakshasas like helpless waifs. Does it become you, this carelessness to safeguard the life and happiness of your devotees ? Glance an eye of pity at the wasted forms of the rishis that are absorbed
 100 in eternal contemplation of you. Behold the cruel wounds dealt them by the weapons of the rakshasas ; behold the pile of skeletons of the good and holy men whom the monsters have mutilated, hacked, burnt and crunched. The miseries of the rishis that dwell on
 105 the banks of the Pampa and the Mandakini and about Chitrakoota defy description. You cannot ask us to go on with our tapas, bestowing no thought upon our bodies ; for, our prayer has no reference to the dangers that befall our vehicles of flesh, rather the utter injustice of our being a silent witness of the heinous offences
 110 and persecutions of the rakshasas towards the great

Ones. We take refuge in you in that you are endowed with the might to protect all the worlds. Save us whose only consolation during our sufferings at the hands of the rakshasas was that you would, at no distant time, come down on earth. The countless worlds hold for us no other shelter, no other refuge but your noble self. Here and hereafter we know no other good." 115

And to them replied Rama "Nay, it becomes you not to speak so. Your seeking my protection is more than a command unto me. It is all unnecessary for you to ask me to save you; it is unmeet of you. I came to this forest of Dandaka but to free you from the persecutions of the rakshasas, The commands of my father thereto is but an accident. So, this exile is to me a glorious blessing in disguise. I have decided to lay low in battle your cruel foes. You will have a chance to see what my valour and the prowess of Lakshmana can effect." 125

Thus did he promise them protection and refuge, 130
Rama whose life they strove to follow. Then he proceeded to the asrama of Suteekshna with his brother and wife, his heart ever centred on the highest dharma; and the holy Ones kept him company.

CHAPTER VII.

SUTEEKSHNA.

FAR did they travel and cross the Mandakini in many a place and came in sight of a mountain that rose into the sky like a huge cloud. They plunged into the dark forests that surrounded it and came upon an asrama nestling in the midst of trees bending low with their welcome tribute of fruits and flowers. Garments 5

of bark were here and there hung up to dry. A hermit
 10 was seated in it in profound contemplation with matted
 coils and dustry. They knew him to be Suteekshna and
 touched his feet in reverence. "Holy One! Rama am
 I named, who offer you my humble respects. Maharsi!
 of matchless might of tapas! adept in the mysteries of
 15 dharma! I crave your blessings."

Suteekshna opened his eyes and warmly embraced
 Rama. "Noblest exponent of the dharma of protecting
 those that seek refuge of you! this asrama is ever
 illumined by your presence; yet to the eyes of the
 20 worldly it would seem that this is the first occasion you
 grace it with your presence. Had you a safe journey
 hither? I await your coming to quit this frail body of
 mine for the worlds of light. Verily the delights of
 swarga stand in the way of Emancipation. It was
 25 brought to me that you have been banished from the
 kingdom and have chosen to dwell at Chitrakoota. I
 would not miss your presence for all that the myriad
 worlds could give me. Indra came here a while ago
 and said 'Your ineffable merit has won for you all the
 30 worlds on high.' You, Lakshmana and Seeta may take
 your choice of them." And to him who thus laid at the
 feet of the Lord the fruits of his acts, Rama replied
 "Holy sir! I would even win them for myself. I pray
 you select for us a likely spot to dwell in these woods.
 35 I know it from Sarabhanga the Gautama that your
 wisdom and power are something unthinkable and that
 you ever seek the highest good of all beings."

Thus did Rama pray of Suteekshna the truthful and
 stern of tapas, even as Brahma would speak to Kasyapa.
 40 The sage was filled with boundless bliss in that Rama
 had granted him supremè liberation and cried, "This
 asrama of mine is admirably suited to you in every way ;

fruits and roots, you can have plenty of them ; bands of rishis live hereabouts ; but I have to mention you the sole drawback it has—many a beast roams here fearless 45 and with curious shapes disturbs the meditations of the sages.” Rama understood the hint that the rakshasas took animal forms and annoyed the hermits. He strung his bow in eager joy and exclaimed “My keen shafts shall pierce the hearts of such beasts ; but I would be 50 guilty of an unpardonable crime if I slew them here and in your presence. Nothing weighs with me so much as sparing you the least trouble or annoyance. If I should await their arrival here, I would have to be an idle spectator of their mischief. So it is best I kill them 55 elsewhere.” To which Suteekshna gave his consent and the party repaired to a lake hard by, went through their evening prayers and spent the night at the asrama. The sage entertained them right hospitably, himself attending to their wants. 60

CHAPTER VIII.

SUTEEKSHNA (*continued*.)

THEY awoke at day-break, had their bath at the lake fragrant with blue lotuses, finished their morning prayers and offerings to the fire, and meditated 5 upon the rising sun. They then approached Suteekshna and said “Reverend sir ! we have been honored more than we deserve by your good self whom all strive to honour. Pray give us leave to depart, for, the rishis that have come with me bid me haste. We would visit 10 the asramas of the righteous hermits that live in these forests. These rishis, ever wedded to their duty, of controlled senses and thoughts, radiant in their lustre even

as the smokeless fire, these and we desire to be on our
 15 way before the sun ascends the heavens, like a wicked
 lord proud of his ill-gotten wealth and corrupted by the
 absence of the society of the good and the great." The
 rishi accepted their salutations, embraced them warmly
 and said " All good go with you. All good follow Seeta
 20 and Lakshmana who are as it were your very shadow.
 You do well to visit the asramas of the holy Ones that
 inhabit the Dandaka. Enjoy the sights and the sounds
 of various beasts and birds, groves bright with flowers
 and fruits, tanks, lakes and sheets of crystal water
 25 where disport joyfully the aquatic birds amidst blown
 lotuses, mountains and heaving valleys with dense
 forests carpeting them, from which fall upon our pleas-
 ed ears the cry of the peacocks. Good-bye Lakshmana,
 good-bye Rama ! I hope to see you back ere long."
 30 They promised to do so, went round the maharshi
 and prepared to depart. Seeta handed them the quivers,
 swords and bows; and armed therewith, the lovely
 youths left the asrama behind them, illumining the
 quarters with their radiance.

CHAPTER IX.

WIFELY SOLICITUDE.

WHEN they were well on their way from the abode
 of Suteekshna who but allowed them to go in
 5 view of the approaching extinction of Ravana
 and his rakshasa brood, Seeta said to herself, " My
 lord, I well know, would not go back upon his promise
 to the rishis. Then the enmity of the rakshasas would
 part him from me and cause him untold misery." She
 10 turned to Rama, and gently and skillfully acquainted

him with her doubts and fears, all through her overwhelming love for him and said, "Lord of my heart! this noble path could be trod only by him who has set his foot on the three evils engendered of Desire; narrow and thorny is it beyond description. Untruth, the 15 first of them, is a bit less dangerous than lusting after other women and causeless persecution of the innocent. Untruth could be never associated with your name in the past or the present or the future. Likewise, your heart is utterly incapable of harbouring any lustful 20 thoughts of other women. Ever wedded to dharma, your heart has no place for any other woman. Your utter filial devotion proclaims you as the soul of virtue and, as such, a man of his word. Of boundless might, your dispassion far exceeds that of Lakshmana. Truth, 25 dharma, power, dispassion and other excellences crown you ever. It comes natural to him who has his senses under perfect control and I well know you as the foremost of such. The ignorant and the misguided are easily led into the third of the evils and causelessly hate 30 and injure others. And I am forced to say that you have caught the contagion now.

"Your word has gone forth to slay in battle the rakshasas in the forest of Dandaka and bring peace and safety to the rishis therein. Did I not hear you say 35 'I have come down fully armed to these woods but for that very purpose'? I saw you start on your expedition against the rakshasas; I reflected upon your utter devotion to truth and pure love to your wedded wife; and I set about to think upon the means that would 40 secure you eternal happiness. Then a deep gloom fell upon me. 'Rama, the servant of Truth, would not fail to slay the rakshasas as he had promised the rishis nor would he injure those with whom he has no quarrel.

45 I see no other chance for it but something connected
 with myself; I will be parted from him and he could
 ill bear it, so utterly faithful is he to me. Now,
 let me find a way out of this tangle.' I see no other
 remedy but to prevent you from travelling through the
 50 forest of Dandaka. For, you and Lakshmana cannot
 be kept from discharging your weapons at the cruel
 beasts and other beings that roam through it. Bows,
 arrows, swords and spears but help to increase the
 strength and energy of kshatriyas, even as dry and
 55 withered wood near a blazing fire. This reminds me of
 a story I have heard.

"There lived of yore a hermit, true of speech and
 pure of heart. Indra sought to test the strength of his
 tapas and, approaching him in the guise of a soldier, left
 60 his sword in his charge. The guileless One roamed
 through the forest and the sword never left his hands
 the while; was it not given him for safe keeping and
 was he not bound to restore it to its owner? In a short
 time the sword inflected him with its own vibrations,
 65 changed his peaceful nature into a cruel and blood-
 thirsty one. He bid farewell to his tapas and delighted
 in cutting at everything he came across. He raced
 down the path to the dreadful hells, all through the
 wicked contact of the sword that filled him with brutish
 70 fierceness and swept away his feet from the path of
 dharma. Weapons make short work of the good nature
 of those with whom they come into contact, as a blazing
 fire consumes the objects within its reach. I but re-
 mind you of what you know, through my love of you
 75 and through the favour I have found in your eyes;
 I would not have you think for a moment that I pre-
 sume to teach you your duty. I would not have you
 slay the rakshasas with whom you have no quarrel. It

becomes not your nature and training; nor does my
 heart consent to it. This taint will spread wider and 80
 deeper with time and lead you to torture and injure
 everything you come across. 'Is it not the duty of the
 kshatriyas to go armed'? True; but to relieve the mis-
 eries of the good and the holy that dwell in the forests.
 'Do you not admit such a necessity'? I submit that you 85
 have no call to do so at present. These weapons should
 grace you when you are on the throne and bear the
 weight of a kingdom on your shoulders. But you have
 put away the crown and everything pertaining to it
 and have come to the calm and peaceful forests. 90
 Strife and battle, death and wounds go hand in hand
 with a kshatriya's life. But, you have donned the garb
 of a hermit whose energies are bent to secure the
 highest good of all beings. These are as far apart as the
 poles. It is meet we follow the life and habits of those 95
 that dwell here; let us throw away these weapons and
 devote ourselves to prayers and meditation. Your
 arms do but insensibly warp your nature. Let us resume
 the kshatriya life when we have done with our exile
 and are once more at Ayodhya. I am sure this will 100
 give boundless pleasure to Dasaratha and Kaikeyi. All
 good follows the steady and unswerving practice of
 dharma; wealth, happiness and knowledge follow in the
 wake of dharma; and Liberation is the fruit of wisdom.
 Dharma is the life-sap that runs through this universe. 105
 No one that gives a free hand to his body and senses
 ever secure this dharma, the hard-won crown of vows,
 observances, fasts, penances, and mortifications of flesh.
 Hence, I submit that it is good for us to engage our-
 selves in tapas in this forest with a pure and undisturb- 110
 ed heart. No one knows better than yourself the Aims
 of life and the means thereto. It is utter presumption

for any one to seek to teach you your dharma ; it was but the woman in me that emboldened me to speak so.
 115 Take counsel of Lakshmana, take deeper counsel with your own heart and do what seems to you "best ; it brooks no delay."

CHAPTER X.

RAMA EXPLAINS HIMSELF.

5 **R**AMA would fulfil his promise at any cost, at any sacrifice to himself ; his heart was ever loyal to the dharma of protecting those that had sought his shelter. He well knew that Seeta spoke to him so, out of her utter devotion and love. "Darling ! right nobly did you speak that which would secure me the highest good as you think ; it is but con-
 10 sonant with your love to me and to the noble line you come of. Well do I know that though young in years, you are deeply versed in the mysteries of dharma. For, are you not the daughter of Janaka, the knower of Brahman ? You spoke true when you said 'Kings bear
 15 arms but to relieve their subjects from sorrow and danger.' Yet, I have promised my protection to the rishis that sought it of me. You were with me when they came of themselves to request my help to free them from the cruelties and torments of the rakshasas.
 20 I heard you say 'You should not slay the innocent ; rather make war upon the foes of the righteous.' Now, these holy men have become to me dearer than my very life the moment they threw themselves upon my mercy ; any harm, any injury done to them is so much done to
 25 me. The rakshasas torment them cruelly as they engage themselves in tapas, fruits and roots their only

fare ; the cannibals ruthlessly slaughter them as they are absorbed in the right and regular performance of vows, fasts and penances. They came to me and prayed my protection and help. I saluted them and replied 30 'Forgive me my fault that I did not, as my duty would have it, seek you where you are. I am quite overwhelmed with shame and despise myself. I pray you command me.' They exclaimed with one voice 'The rakshasas in this forest take any forms they will and 35 torment us cruelly. Save us from their hands. They fall upon us at unexpected moments and desecrate our agnihotras and fortnightly sacrifices. You are our only hope, our only beacon in this storm and stress. It is but child's play for us to consume the wicked ones with 40 our yogic might ; but, we would not so waste the fruits of long years of stern tapas. Verily it is no light thing this tapas, almost impossible ; countless are the obstacles in the way. That is how these monsters are yet alive though they kill us by scores. We claim protection of 45 you and your brother, for upon you devolves that duty.'

"Could I do less than pass my word to slay the rakshasas ? They are *my* enemies ; they snatch from me my sustenance, the tapas of the hermits ; they torment those who have the right to rest under the shadow of 50 my arm ; I count my life as nothing if I but carry it out. Hard, unutterably hard, would it be for me to part from you. The Sruti has it that the wife is a half of ourself ; and he that came into the world with us is but our very self. We labour to acquire wealth that it might serve 55 us in times of need ; we hold it cheap if it is useful to save our wife and children from danger or want ; but, we hold wealth, wife and children as nothing when placed against our lives. Yet, I go a step further. I would gladly lose yourself, Lakshmana and my life, if 60

it would help me to fulfil my promise. Again, I know no other god, no other deity but the knowers of Brahman. There is nothing with me higher than Truth. So, it is my bounden duty to serve the rishis even without any
 65 request on their part. And would I fail after having given them my word to do so? Well do I know that you spoke thus out of your deep love to me and the grief at being torn from my side. Well do I know that the sincerest counsel comes from him who has our welfare
 70 at heart. Are you not the daughter of Janaka who reached the sublime heights of perfection through a faithful and conscientious performance of duty? Your mother's heart would see no guilt, no offence in *any one*. Your words do but become you. Yet, you are
 75 dearer to me than my very life and it would please me infinitely if you practise the very same dharma as myself."

Thus did he soothe and console Seeta; and the heroes proceeded, fully armed, to make a tour among
 80 the holy asramas that dotted the forest.

CHAPTER XI.

AMONG THE ASRAMAS.

RAMA led the way, Seeta followed him and Lakshmana brought up the rear, bow in hand. Far they travelled, feasting their eyes with many a sight—mountains, woods, fair streams dotted with sandy hillocks covered with water-fowls, lotus pools and lakes hid under clouds of herons, storks and other aquatic birds, herds of spotted deer, droves of wild
 10 buffaloes, bands of wild boars that destroy trees and lordly elephants that make a pathway for themselves.

It was sunset as they reached the banks of a beautiful lake a yojana square. Lovely lotuses and other flowers full-blown carpeted the water; wild elephants swam and bathed in it joyously; swans and other 15 water-fowls floated gaily upon its bosom. But, wonder of wonders! from its crystal depths arose sounds of song and music and dance, though there was no creature in view. The princes were surprised at it and Rama asked of the sage Dharmabhrit that walked by his side 20 "This wonderful lake fills us with surprise and curiosity. May I know something about it?"

To which the rishi "Panchapsarasaras is it named. Mandakarni fashioned it out of the might of his tapas in the forgotten past. Thousands of years did he practise 25 stern tapas in these waters, the viewless air his only fare. The gods were sore disturbed thereat and resolved among themselves that he was striving for a place among them and should be foiled. Five of the loveliest apsarāsas were deputed to the work. The maharshi, as 30 a knower of Brahman, affected to be caught in the toils of love—but to secure the ends of the devas. The ladies stayed with him as his wives; he spends his time with them in a dream of bliss as a handsome youth, in a wonderful mansion erected in these waters 35 through his yogic might. The sweet music of their ornaments and the sweeter melody of their song and dance are wafted to our ears in rippling waves of delicious harmony." "Wonderful" exclaimed Raghava and, travelling for a while, came upon the groups of 40 asramas.

They teemed with brahmanas and were adorned with *kusa* grass and robes of bark. The party stayed among them for a while, enjoying the warm hospitality of the holy men. They repeated their visits oft and stayed 45

for varying periods of thirteen months, twelve, four, five, six, seven, one and a quarter, three-quarters, three and eight, until ten long years stole silently away. Then they returned to the asrama of Suteekshna and
50 dwelt there for a while.

One day Rama asked the rishi "Holy sir! the hermits give me to understand that maharshi Agastya has his abode in this forest. I cannot locate it. May I know where it is? I would proceed there and seek the
55 presence of the saintly One to serve him for a while." Suteekshna was highly pleased thereat and replied "It was in my mind to speak to you on this subject. I am glad that you proposed it yourself. Four yojanas to the south of this asrama lives the brother of Agastya
60 in the midst of dense pippali forests. It abounds in fruits and flowers; crowds of parrots warble melodiously; holy lotus-pools meet the eye everywhere, the favourite home of swans, herons and other waterfowls; rest there for the night and resume your journey
65 at day-break. A yojana to the south of it you come upon the asrama of Agastya. Trees of curious shape and color will delight your eyes and beasts and birds. Start to-day if you will."

Rama and his party followed the route marked for
70 them by Suteekshna and passed by lovely groves, cloud like mountains, lakes and rivers. He turned to his brother and said "I believe we are nearing the asrama of Agastya's brother. Our short acquaintance with the forests has made me familiar with the various foot-paths
75 and the trees, fruits and flowers therein. The breeze wafts to us the pungent fragrance of ripe pippali fruits. Piles of wood lie here and there ready split for fuel. The *kusa* grass along the paths, green as emeralds, have

been gathered by the sages. A dark cloud hangs over the centre of yon grove, probably of the smoke from 80 countless 'sacrificial fires. Behold those brahmanas, fresh from their bath in the sacred waters, who themselves gather flowers for worship. This is the asrama of Agastya's brother as described by Suteekshna. The mighty Agastya came to the south of India to secure 85 the well-being of its inhabitants and destroyed the asuras terrible as the Lord of death.

"Two brothers lived here of yore, Vatapi and Ilvala so named. Asuras they were, supremely cruel, that fed upon the flesh of brahmanas. Ilvala, in the guise of a 90 brahmana, used to respectfully invite, in well-chosen Sanskrit, the brahmanas that passed this way to partake of his hospitality in a sraddha he was performing. Vatapi turned himself into a sheep and him did his brother kill and serve his flesh to the brahmanas 95 with due rites. When they had eaten of it, Ilvala cried out 'Vatapi! come forth.' At once that wicked asura bleated like a sheep and came out of the stomach of the brahmanas, killing them on the spot. Day after day did these fiends feed upon many a brahmana until the gods 100 entreated Agastya to journey hither. He partook of the meat placed before him by Ilvala in the sraddha. 'Are you satisfied?' asked Ilvala. 'I am satisfied' replied Agastya. Then the asura poured water on his hands and called out, as usual, to his brother to come 105 forth. Thereat Agastya laughed loud and said 'Your brother has been by now thoroughly digested by me; perhaps you may meet him in the mansions of Death. You but wait for him here in vain.' Ilvala sprang at the sage in fury to avenge his brother, but was consumed 110 to ashes by the fire that darted from his eyes. And this is the asrama of the brother of the mighty Agastya

who wrought this miracle all through his love of the brahmanas."

- 115 Meantime the sun set ; they offered their evening prayers and entered the hermitage. The maharshi welcomed them with unfeigned pleasure, and they spent the night with him. Next morning, Rama went up to him and said " Holy sir ! a happy night did we pass in
- 120 your abode, thanks to your noble hospitality. Pray give us leave to proceed to the asrama of Agastya." " Fare you well " replied the sage and they journeyed along the route marked by Suteekshna. While there met their wondering gaze forest trees of various kinds and
- 125 colors, plants, shrubs and saplings covered with flowers and creepers through which wild elephants had rudely cut themselves a way ; birds of varied plume and note sounded from among their midst and curious monkeys. " Lakshmana ! " said Rama " these trees grow in luxuri-
- 130 ance, thanks to the fostering care of the people here. Birds and beasts wear an air of calm and peace. Hence, I guess right, we are nearing the asrama of the maharshi ; care and grief fall away from the shoulders of those that seek these retreats. The sacrificial smoke
- 135 rolls among the trees from which hang garments of bark, while birds and beasts roam in peace and content through them. The rakshasas shun these spots and dare not invade the southern quarter as before. Nay, many of them have put away their cruel habits and
- 140 fierce and lead lives of quiet. The sage has given his name to this quarter. Cruel creatures, man and beast, dare not even raise their eyes towards it. Once upon a time, mount Vindhya grew and grew, intent upon blocking up the path of the sun ; but, Agastya com-
- 145 manded it to forbear. Countless years have passed over his head. Of unparalleled renown, all beings offer

him deserved worship, for his heart is centred in the welfare of the good and the holy. Verily, he would compass our highest good if we wait upon him. I propose we spend the remaining years of our exile in 150 reverent service to him. Devas and gandharvas, siddhas and maharshis ever offer him worship and homage. The liar, the man of cruel deeds, the sinner in secret, the murderer, the heartless and the unbridled cannot stay here. Devas and yakshas, nagas and patagas (garuda 155 and his kind) frequent this asrama to lay up merit through stern vows and observances. Many a maharshi here perfected himself in tapas, put away his garment of flesh and rose to the worlds of light in godly splendour, borne aloft upon sunlike vimanas (cars). 160 The devas are pleased at the worship and adoration offered them by the sages here and raise their devotees to the worlds of yakshas and gods, not to speak of the lordship of the kingdoms on earth. Well, we are even at the asrama. Go in advance and respectfully submit 165 to the maharshi that Seeta and I await his permission to pay our respects to him."

CHAPTER XII.

AGASTYA.

LAKSHMANA sought out a disciple of the sage and said "Ramachandra, son of Dasaratha, the emperor of Ayodhya is come to pay his res- 5 pects to the maharshi and his wife with him. His brother Lakshmana am I, bound to him by devotion and love unspeakable. May be you know it. We are commanded by our father to live in these forests for a while. Pray acquaint your master with our arrival." 10

"As you will" replied the other, and approaching Agastya in his fire-chamber, said to him over joined palms "Lord! Rama and Lakshmana, the sons of Dasaratha, are come here with Seeta to pay their
 15 respects to you. What are your commands?" Overjoyed to hear that the god of his heart, Rama, had even sought him out in his humble abode accompanied by Seeta and Lakshmana, he exclaimed "Long have I expected him here. And so, he has verily come here?
 20 Supremely delighted am I. Lead them here with due respect. Tarry not." The disciple ran to Lakshmana and said to him in a voice that betrayed his fear of the consequences of his delay, "Who might be Rama? The maharshi expects him." Lakshmana led him to
 25 the door and pointed out to him Rama and Seeta. He humbly conveyed to Rama the message of Agastya and with every respect took them to where his master was. On the way, Rama beheld herds of deer roaming peacefully and glanced with delight at the altars raised
 30 to Brahma, Agni, Vishnu, Indra, Soorya, Chandra, Bhaga, Kubera, Dhata, Vidhata, Vayu, Ananta, Gayatri, the Vasus, Varuna, Kartikeya and Dharma. By that time the maharshi came forward to meet him followed by his disciples, noticing which, Rama said to
 35 his brother, "Behold the great One that walks in front of yon sages blazing in their lustre; verily he is Agastya. No hard task to identify him by his supreme radiance and glory." They touched his feet and stood before him with joined palms. Agastya offered them
 40 the rites of hospitality, enquired after their welfare and directed them to seats. Then he performed the daily Vaisvadeva, offered his guests water to wash their hands and feet and placed before them fruits, roots and other hermit fare. Thereafter they seated themselves

comfortably and Agastya said to them “ Rama ! the 45
hermit should offer daily oblations into the fire and
worship the guest duly ; otherwise, he rots in dark hells
and feeds upon his own flesh like a perjurer. You are
no ordinary guest, but the Lord of the earth. The
noblest exponent of dharma you are, the prince of 50
heroes and deserve every worship and reverence.
Last, you are my guest well-beloved ; taken every way,
it behoves me to offer you my best welcome.

• “ Behold this noble bow fashioned of yore for
Mahavishnu by Visvakarma. These exhaustless pair 55
of quivers were left here by Indra. Observe these
shafts blazing like tongues of fire and this sword in its
scabbard of gold. Accept of me this blade curiously
chased with gold and gems, these bow, arrows and qui-
vers. In the far past, these helped Mahavishnu to slay 60
the asuras and confer untold good upon the devas.
Take back these weapons, for they are yours ; defeat
your enemies with them and bring peace and happiness
to all beings ; Indra shines not more, armed with his
vajra ;” and Agastya of inconceivable might handed 65
them over to Rama.

CHAPTER XIII.

TO PANCHAVATI.

NEXT, he said to Rama “ Dear boy ! I am delighted
beyond measure at your seeking me out in this
lonely retreat. Your long walk has fatigued 5
you much, as I see by your heavy perspiration. Seeta
the daughter of Janaka, brought up in luxury and com-
fort, suffers more than you and would, as I see, gladly
seek repose. Poor girl ! privation and want were utter

10 strangers to her. Her supreme love to her husband has rendered her unconscious of the troubles and perils of this wild life in the forest. I wonder at her temerity (I am almost tempted to call it so) in following you here; and it is your first duty to see that she knows
 15 not danger or grief. It is quite natural for women to minister to the comforts of their husbands in the summer of prosperity and desert him when the chill winters of adversity grip him hard. Fickle and changing ever, to one thing constant never, like lightning flashes, they
 20 are crueller and more heartless than weapons. Years of friendship are forgotten in a moment. In rash and inconsiderate action they are swifter than Garuda or the Lord of air. I am glad to see that Seeta is untainted by any of these defects; she deserves the esteem and
 25 approbation of the good and the holy; she towers over the good wives of the world like unto Arundhati the spouse of Vasishtha. Verily, you three illumine and cheer this humble abode of mine with your presence."

Thereat Raghava clasped his hands in humble
 30 reverence and said, "Holy one! blessed am I above compare in that I have found favour in your eyes. Verily, we have laboured hard in the past to lay up no ordinary merit if our slight virtues should go to please you, who gratify to the utmost the wishes of those that seek
 35 your presence. I pray you direct us to a spot where we could reside in peace and retirement; better if it is hid in the midst of groves and water-courses." Agastya ran his eye over the future and all it held and selecting a likely spot, replied "Rama! two yojanas from here is
 40 a place named Panchavati. Fruits and roots are abundant there; beasts and birds of various kind roam fearlessly; set up your dwelling there and pass your days in quiet repose. You are almost through the

period of exile laid upon you by Dasaratha; and ere long you will be back at Ayodhya with long years of 45 usefulness and joy before you. King Yayati of old was raised to the high worlds through the merits of his first-born; even so, Dasaratha, your father, is now among the blessed, thanks to you. My friendship with him and my yogic powers have acquainted me with every- 50 thing that has befallen you till now. I guess your purpose when you replied to me 'Direct us to a likely spot' though I had invited you to dwell with me here. So, repair to Panchavati. It is a lovely place on the banks of the Godaveri and within easy approach of my 55 asrama. In every way, you cannot pitch upon a more suitable abode; besides, I am sure Seeta will like it much. It is as quiet and secluded as you and your wife could desire. See you yon grove of madhuka trees. Take the path that leads north from it till you come to 60 a large banyan tree; cross the high ground next to it and you will come in sight of a mountain. Next to it is Panchavati; you can recognize it by its groves with their graceful crown of flowers." They took leave of the sage with due reverence and journeyed on to Pan- 65 chavati armed with bows and quivers, along the route marked for them by Agastya.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LINE OF JATAYU.

ON their way they saw a huge vulture terrible to behold, perched on a banyan tree, and naturally taking it for a rakshasa, the brothers asked it 5 "Who are you?;" to which it replied sweetly and affectionately "Dears! I am your father's best friend." Rama

saluted it with reverence and requested to know its name
 and lineage. Thereupon, the bird began to relate the
 10 origin of all things and of his line. "At the dawn of
 creation, Kardama, Vikreeta, Sessa, Samsraya, Sthanu,
 Mareechi, Atri, Kratu, Pulastya, Angirās, Prachetas,
 Pulaha, Daksha, Vivaswan and Kasyapa held the office
 of Lords of beings. Daksha had sixty daughters of
 15 whom Kasyapa married eight—Aditi, Diti, Danu, Kalika,
 Tamra, Krodhavaśa, Manu and Anila—and commanded
 them to beget offspring that will be regents of the three
 worlds. Aditi, Diti, Manu and Kalika alone obeyed him.
 The twelve Adityas, eight Vasus, eleven Rudras and
 20 two Aswinis were born of Aditi. Diti begot Daityas
 who ruled this earth in the far-off past. Asvagreva
 the danava was the son of Danu, while Kalika gave
 birth to Naraka and Kalaka. Tamra had five girls
 Kraunchi, Bhasi, Syeni, Dhritarashtri and Sūki. Krau-
 25 nchi was the mother of owls, Bhasi of fowls, Syeni of
 eagles and vultures, Dhritarashtri of swans, herons,
 and aquatic birds; Suki begot Nata and she Vinata.
 Krodhavaśa gave birth to Mrigi, Mrigamanda, Hari,
 Bhadramata, Matangi, Sardooli, Sweta, Surabhi, Surasa,
 30 and Kadruka. Mrigi was the mother of deer, Mriga-
 manda of bears and deer whose hair go to make
 chauries and chamaras, Hari of lions and monkeys,
 Bhadramata of Iravati (whose son is the world-famed
 elephant Airavata), Matangi of elephants, Sardooli of
 35 tigers and long-tailed monkeys, Sweta of the eight
 elephants that support the quarters of the world,
 Surabhi of Rohini and Gandharvi (cows were born of
 the former and horses of the latter), Surasa of many-
 hooded serpents, Kadru of the ordinary kind, Manu of
 40 brahmanas, kshatriyas, vaiśyas and sudras, Anala of
 trees bearing delicious fruits, Kadru of Adishesha that

bears the globe on his thousand heads and Vinata of Garuda and Aruna. The latter begot of Syeni (another of the name), Sampati and myself Jatayu. These woods teem with wild beasts and rakshasas; so, I will watch 45 over Seeta while you are out a-hunting."

Rama embraced him with great affection and ever after treated him with respect as the friend of their father. They placed Seeta under his protection and like the roaring fire about to consume the moths, they 50 travelled on to Panchavati on their work of destroying the rakshasas.

CHAPTER XV.

THEIR COTTAGE.

THEY reached the place and Rama said to Lakshmana (he was as it were dedicated by his mother Sumitra to the service of his brother 5 and was blessed with the necessary devotion and capacity; the hero rejoiced to see that the time and place were quite favourable to begin his work) "This is the place selected for us by the maharshi. This is Panchavati thick with flower-crested trees. 10 You have lived in the forests long enough to choose a likely site for our cottage. Seeta would prefer it to be among trees ever crowned with lovely flowers; I would like it to be even and carpeted with soft sand, as I am somewhat particular about my bed; further, 15 sacrificial fuel, flowers, *kusa* grass and water should be within easy reach. We look to you for everything; so, find us some place that will suit us all".

Lakshmana would not brook his brother's words that made much of the comforts of his unworthy self; 20

he approached him through Seeta and said " Lord! you are the master and I am but your slave. Your level and nature are something apart; joyful service is mine for ever. And this, not alone when you are in your
 25 world of glory on high, but also when you come down in mortal guise. It would be more natural and kinder to me if you ordered me to select a spot that would suit yourself and Seeta: I am all unworthy of being taken into consideration; hence I pray you choose
 30 yourself a likely spot and give me my orders." Pleased therewith, Rama pitched upon a place suitable in every way and linking his arm within that of Lakshmana out of the love that filled his heart, said " Dear! this spot is level, lovely and graced with trees of beautiful foliage.
 35 Raise our humble cottage here. Pools of water carpeted with blown lotuses of sweet fragrance meet the eye everywhere; and the Godaveri flows hard by even as Agastya described it to us, its banks hid by bright trees; swans, herons and other water-fowl float on its
 40 waters; it is neither too near nor too distant from the hills; herds of deer roam fearlessly: peacocks send forth sweet cries; lovely caves meet the eye here and there, while flower-laden trees hide them from view as it were. Veins of gold, silver, copper and other metals
 45 cover the hills like windows and give us the idea of large elephants painted with cunningly arranged shades of colour. Palm, date, jack, mango, asoka, champaka, sandal, orange, mahogany, cotton and numerous other trees of strange shape and foliage flourish here in
 50 luxuriance. Holy is this spot and pure, teeming with birds and beasts; let us spend our days happily here in the company of Jatayu."

It did not take long for Lakshmana to raise a spacious cottage there. The walls were of earth, the pillars

were fashioned of bamboos ; rafters and cross-trees were 55
skillfully laid, thickly covered with leafy boughs,
firmly secured with strips of bark. Reeds, *kusa* grass
and leaves were laid over them while the floor was
raised firm and smooth. He purified himself by a bath
in the Godaveri, gathered fruits and flowers, performed 60
the religious rites that precede the occupation of a
house and led Rama to the place. Verily it was a sight
to delight the hearts of the young couple. "My dear
boy!" said Rama "a wonderful structure this and
charming. Words are too poor to express my feelings 65
of pleasure and satisfaction. I grieve that I have not
the wherewithal to recognize your services as I would ;
yet, let me clasp you to my breast in supreme love as a
slight earnest of it. True, it was in my thoughts to
fashion a place where I could be alone with Seeta ; but 70
I never gave expression to it ; yet, here you have divined
it somehow and put it into execution. Dasaratha spent
long centuries of childlessness before he saw our faces ;
hence, you put up this cottage with due considerations
of favourable planetary aspects that we might spend 75
happy days in it. A prince like myself, you utterly
effaced yourself and would look but to my comforts in
this. My happiness was your sole reward. The son
(putra) is so named because he saves the father from
the hell *put*. Now our father knows no hell more 80
terrible than leave a wish of mine ungratified. You
have saved him from that hell in that you leave me
nothing to desire. I am sure he has deputed you to
take his place and fulfil my lightest desire. My sire
is not dead, for, you are he. Through you, he pursues 85
his pleasant task of spoiling me by over-indulgence."
They lived there awhile in happiness and quiet, his
brother and wife serving him with love and devotion.

CHAPTER XVI.

WINTER.

AUTUMN passed away and its place was taken by
 winter. It was a welcome season to the hermits
 5 and to Rama in that it brought there Soorpan-
 akha who was to be the death of Khara and Dooshana.
 Fond couples welcomed it too, as it afforded them constant
 facilities of warmly embracing each other. One
 morning, Rama took his way to the Godaveri, followed
 10 by Seeta and Lakshmana. Then, the latter drew the
 attention of Rama to the change of season and said
 "Brother! winter has set in, so dear to you. Verily,
 it graces the year and ennobles it. Now, the people
 cannot boast of the smoothness of their skin, for the
 15 cold makes it rough and chapped; plants and trees
 grow in luxuriance; the water is unbearably cold to
 the touch, while the fire is extremely welcome. House-
 holders wash themselves of their sins through the *agra-*
yana rite performed in honour of the pitris. Love and
 20 passion reign supreme over the hearts of men; milk,
 curds and butter are plenty. Kings start on their
 expeditions against the enemy. The sun prefers the
 southern quarter and the north is shorn of her glory
 like a widowed wife with vacant forehead. The Hima-
 25 layas, naturally covered with snow, now take fresh
 layers of it and justify the name *the abode of snow*.
 The sun gives a pleasant warmth at noon; one can
 safely raise his eyes to him. Welcome shade and cool
 waters, the very thought sends a shiver through our
 30 blood. The sun gives not warmth enough; the cold is
 too much for him; the beasts of the forest lie hid in
 holes, dens and coverts, prevented from going about by

the freezing cold, heightened by the bare leafless trees. Men sit rolled up like a snake, as if to render themselves impregnable to the attacks of cold. They sleep 35 not at nights under the sky as before; the month of Pushya draws nigh: the fast-falling snow tinges with a dull red everything it touches. Keen piercing blasts tear through the nights. The day wanes and the night waxes long. The moon has handed over his beauty 40 and power to the sun and lies a prisoner behind the bars of sleet and snow, like a bright mirror bedimmed by the foul breath of man. The full-moon night is shorn of its lustre by the scudding snow-drifts even like yon Seeta whom the fierce sun has tanned and weakened; 45 but, he dare not dream of a millionth part of her supernal beauty and radiance. The winds from the west, naturally chill, are rendered more cruel now that frost and snow have joined hands with them. In the dark forests, barley, wheat and other woodland grains glisten 50 at daybreak white with dew drops; and from amidst them curlews and other water-fowls speak to one another in no indistinct tones. To me it looks like the sorrow-laden forests venting the grief of their hearts in loud wails and sobs. The tall ears of golden corn, 55 bending low under their precious burden, present the appearance of date-palms in full flower. The sun may rise in the sky ever so high, but, like the moon looks he with his rays rendered powerless by fogs and mists. His heat and light are manifest somewhat in the fore- 60 noon; it is a little pleasant at midday, when the earth takes on a dull red slightly relieved by gleams of white. The ever-falling snow drenches the soft grass of the meadows and invests them with a quaint charm in the early hours of the morning; wild elephants are driven 65 by thirst to the fords and lakes; they put out their

long trunks but draw back with a startled cry—the cold is too much for them. Like raw levies trembling with vague fears as their maiden battle draws near,
 70 the water-fowl line the banks of the rivers and would not cultivate a closer acquaintance. The woodland paths are hid by mists and reeking damp and seem as if they were in profound slumber, unrelieved as they are by flowers. The coursing waters in the rivers are
 75 invisible too, thanks to the heavy clouds of rolling fog that covers them like a pall. One can locate the water-fowl only by their cries. The yellow sands on their banks are wet and damp by dew. The pools of water on lofty mountain-heights are rendered sweeter yet by
 80 the fast-falling snow and the innocuous rays of the sun. Lotus-ponds lie bereft of their charm and beauty, their flowers scorched and shrivelled by snow and their bare stalks standing in unlovely prominence.

And it is now that Bharata of righteous soul turns
 85 himself to stern tapas at Nandigram, his heart filled with utter devotion to you and grief. Renouncing fame and power, kingdom and riches, he sleeps upon the bare cold earth and manages to keep himself alive upon a meagre diet. You are sure to come upon him thus early
 90 as he wends his way to the freezing waters of Sarayu to have his morning bath, and his officers with him. Brought up in refined luxury and soft comfort, formed to spend his days in joy and pleasure, with flower-soft limbs of delicate beauty, how could he, poor soul, bring
 95 himself to plunge his wasted frame in the dank, chill depths of the Sarayu? Yet dharma has no mysteries for him; truthful of heart, with senses under stern control, he ever keeps his feet from the paths of evil. That prince of heroes, with lovely eyes that put to
 100 shame the petals of the lotus, dark-hued even as the

surcharged clouds in winter, with slender and powerful
 loins like a lion, he steals the hearts of all by his honey-
 ed words pregnant with kindness and sympathy; his long
 and powerful arms, that reach below his knees like the
 tusks of wild elephants, betoken extraordinary strength 105
 that is but an outward expression of the warrior soul
 within. Still he has joyfully chosen to forego comfort,
 luxury, pomp and power and lay himself and his heart
 at your feet, his brother, ever deserving of the worship
 and reverence of the world. He would live the rough 110
 forest life that is your portion, even down to the minu-
 test detail; and he has won the Worlds of light in con-
 sequence. He has falsified that old saw—'Children take
 more after the mother and have less of the father in
 them'—I wonder whence had she that tiger-heart, Kai- 115
 keyi, with a husband like Dasaratha and a son like
 Bharata." But, Rama would have none of it; the well-
 deserved censure he would not allow, though it arose
 from the fond love that Lakshmana bore to Bharata. He
 stopped him short and said in accents of grave reproof 120
 "Nay, never does our mother Kaikeyi deserve any
 unkind remark at your hands, not the lightest. It
 would please me better if you held forth longer on the
 manifold virtues of Bharata. My heart is set firm on
 fulfilling the promise I have made to my father; yet I 125
 cannot put away from myself the ever-growing yearning
 to go back and have a sight of Bharata. His sweet and
 pleasant speech ring in my ears yet, fraught with kind-
 ness, sympathy and devotion. Ah! would that the
 present moment brought us together, you, he and I, and 130
 saw the close of our exile in the interminable forests."

And thus bewailing, they took their way to the
 river, had their bath, offered libations to the Fathers and
 gods and raised their voices in prayer to the Lord of

135 light and the other Powers. They then returned to their lowly abode, recalling to one's mind a similar scene in mount Kailas of Mahadeva walking back to his home of snow and ice, fresh from his bath, Paryati and Nandi following him at a respectful distance.

CHAPTER XVII.

SOORPANAKHA.

RAMA went through the round of morning rites and ceremonies, after which he repaired to where Lakshmana awaited him and other holy sages thereabouts. And upon him in deep talk with them on themes high and holy, came all unexpectedly a rakshasi, even as Rahu (the asura of the eclipse) approaches the radiant moon in company with the bright constellation of Chitra. Soorpanakha (for so was she named) was the favourite sister of Ravana. Her eyes fell upon Rama as he sat there in all his majestic beauty ; his broad and leonine chest, his long and powerful arms that reached below his knees, his lordly gait like that of an elephant in rut, his eyes lovely as the petals of a full blown lotus and his charming complexion that rivalled the delicate beauty of the blue lily riveted her eyes. Clad in the lowly garb of hermits, with dress of bark and matted hair, the signs of high royalty shone through the cloud of adversity. Fairer by far than the God of love, more radiant than millions of suns, of more charming presence than the Queen of night, of prowess and valor undreamt of by the Lord of the celestials, Raghava she looked at and lost her heart to him.

25 Rama's face was an epitome of all high and royal excellences ; Soorpanakha had a face hideous and

frightful to look at. Rama had slender loins like a lion ; the rakshasi had a waist that expanded interminably like a huge war-drum. Rama's eyes were broad and delicately pencilled with red like lotus petals ; Ravana's 30 sister had eyes of lurid red that emitted a dull glow. Sweet clustering curls clung round the head of Rama ; Soorphanakha had a short straggling mane of flaming red. To look upon Rama was to love him for ever ; indescribable disgust filled the hearts of those that had 35 the misfortune to meet the giantess. Words of rippling melody fell from the lips of Rama as from some finely-tuned musical instrument ; the rasping raucous tones of the rakshasi caused the hearers to swoon away in a dead fright. Rama was in the flower of his youth ; 40 she that wooed him was as old as Time. Rama ever spoke softly and charmingly ; treachery and deceit ever lay behind the words of Ravana's sister. Rama's life was ever pure, open and altruistic ; the rakshasi led a life of incarnate vice. Rama was the handsomest of 45 men ; Soorpanakha was as ugly as Sin.

Love blinded her heart as she roared at to the hermit prince " What brought you to these wilds with wife and companion, armed and accounted like a warrior, yet disguised as a meek hermit ? Know you not that 50 these are the haunts of the rakshasas that batten on human flesh ? " Now, Rama was a heroic prince ; his heart was ever wedded to virtue and he would not soil his lips with an untruth. And would he bring himself to utter one when he had dedicated himself to a life of 55 purity and service ? And what was worse, would he deceive a woman ? He turned to her where she stood and replied in gentle accents of kindness " There lived on earth an emperor, Dasaratha so called, like unto the gods in valor. His first-born am I and Rama they call 60

- me. This is Lakshmana my brother, who chose to share with me my forest life. That is my wife Seeta, the daughter of the ruler of the Videhas. Upon our hearts and heads lie the commands of our parents, in obedience
 65 to which we roam through these forests, laying up a precious store of dharma. But, who are you? Whom do you live with? Your huge and ungainly proportions and features proclaim you of the rakshasas. Why have you come among us? Speak straight."
- 70 But the giantess was far gone in overmastering and unholy love and exclaimed "Soorpanakha am I, a rakshasi by birth. I change shapes at will. I delight in roaming through these forests all alone. All created beings tremble at my approach. No obstacles stay my
 75 course, no dangers daunt my heart. The mighty Ravana is my brother, whom the rakshasas on earth are proud to obey. Doubtless have you heard of the great hero, the son of the holy Visravas. Two other brothers have I—Kumbhakarna the hugest and strongest of be-
 80 ings, who sleeps on for ages at a stretch and Vibheeshana, who, born of the rakshasas, yet would live an un-rakshasa life. Khara and Dooshana, the heroes of a thousand battles, hold a similar relation to me. But none of these have any power over me or control. I
 85 obey but my sweet will. I have come here impelled by an overmastering desire to woo and win you to my side, aye, from the very moment I set my eyes upon you. Inconceivable is my might and wonderful; you may take it that no power in heaven or earth or hell can bar
 90 my way. I mean to wed you and I see long years of happiness before us. This Seeta, how does she stead you? A weak and poor worm, repulsive to look at, what sort of a life do you lead with this painted doll? Turn your eyes to *me*. Am I not in every way a meet

companion for your beautiful self ? ‘ Look upon this picture and upon that ’—her frail slight form and mine that towers aloft like the Meru. She trembles in affright at a shadow ; the whole creation trembles in affright at the sound of my name. Her lean and emaciated waist, what poor show does it make by the side of my huge drum-like loins ! Nay, look well at me and say whether I am a fit mate for you or Seeta. Stay, yon slip of a girl that bars our road to happiness and that brother of yours will make a toothsome morsel for me. Then we may roam at our will through forests and glades and take our pleasure on wooded mountain peaks and in the bosom of flowered valleys.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

• A NOVEL CURE FOR LOVE.

THUS raved Soorpanakha, with eyes red as madira (that heady wine), impelled thereto by her overmastering passion. And to her replied Rama with a smile, in gentle, calm and convincing accents: “ I have a wife and unfortunately, I love her dearly. I cannot put her away nor keep you both. Such as you, will find it intolerable to be a co-wife. Now, Lakshmana there, my brother, is the soul of propriety ; handsome as a god, in the prime of youth, a famous warrior, I would suggest that you prefer your suit to him. He has not taken his wife with him ; he has been for a long time a stranger to the company and pleasures of woman ; he wants a wife sorely and you are, I am sure, an evenly matched pair ; win him and you may be the unrivalled mistress of his heart and home like the radiant sun over the mount Meru.”

Rama spoke thus in jest, loth, out of his infinite
 20 pity, to pain by a sharp refusal the heart of one who
 loved him madly. But, she, the rakshasi, possessed by
 the demon of lust, would not take the hint and relieve
 him of her unwelcome presence. She took his words in
 all seriousness, drew to the side of Lakshmana and
 25 said "Verily, I am fashioned to be your wife; our grace
 and beauty match well. Let us roam together through
 these forests of Dandaka, happy in each other's com-
 pany." But, Lakshmana was not a whit behind his
 brother in fertility of resource or honeyed eloquence.
 30 He laughed low and said "Nay, pause a little. See you
 not I am the bondsman of my brother here? Would I
 degrade one of your birth, rank and accomplishments
 by making you the slave of a slave? For, you will have
 to act as the tire-woman and slave of Seeta even as I
 35 serve her husband. Now, if you take Rāma as your
 husband and he the lord of untold wealth and power, he
 will gratify the wishes of your heart to the uttermost;
 so, take your place as his second wife. Perhaps, you
 doubt his accepting you when he has another wife al-
 40 ready; but, only a born idiot would ever dream of wast-
 ing a glance at a wretched mortal woman after having
 feasted his eyes upon your witching loveliness and
 superhuman beauty. Seeta! why, a very owl of deform-
 ity, bad, lean-waisted, a thing beneath notice. You
 45 may take my word for it he will drive her away
 from him and be your willing slave for ever and for
 ever."

The fool of a rakshasi could not perceive the deli-
 cate irony and loathing that ran through the words of
 50 Lakshmana; her obtuse brain swallowed it all un-
 suspectingly; she ran back to where Raghava sat and
 cried "Your doll-wife there, ugly, unknown, wicked, old

and lean ! I wonder that you yet plague yourself with her. That is why your heart would not lean towards me. Drive her away I say. She stands in the path of my 55 hopes and happiness. There, you will not ? Well, I will even crunch her bones right before your eyes and teach you what it is to live with such a woman as myself ; co-wives shall trouble me not." And like a comet hur- ling itself upon the constellation Rohini, did she of the 60 flaming eyes spring towards Seeta in deadly anger. But Rama stayed her with a shout as the rakshasi flew at his wife like the noose of Death and rebuked Laksh- mana in angry tones. " Utter folly it were to play and jest with cruel persons and mean. Seeta is about to 65 drop down dead from fear at the hideous apparition of yon giantess. Deal her out the punishment she deserves —mutilate her." Thereat Lakshmana was roused to fury and said to himself " My brother was even now jesting with her since she did not prove herself danger- 70 ous. Now she would slay Seeta and has spoken her own doom through Rama's lips." He unsheathed his sword and sliced off the ears and nose of the rakshasi. With frightful roars she flew back on the wings of speed through the forests to where she came from. Ugly by 75 nature, hideous to look at, the blood flowed from her face in huge torrents as she emitted terrible roars like win- ter-clouds calling to one another. She ran to Janastha- na, sought the presence of Khara her cruel-hearted brother, where he sat among his rakshasas and fell at 80 his feet like a thunderbolt. Swooning from fear and loss of blood, she acquainted him with the visit of Rama, Lakshmana and Seeta to the Dandaka forest and the cruel treatment she had at their hands and emphasised her words by pointing to the spouting streams of blood 85 from her mutilated face.

CHAPTER XIX.

KHARA ROUSED TO FURY.

T

 HE sight of his sister, rolling upon the ground in terrible agony amidst an ever-growing pool of blood from her mutilated ears and nose, roused Khara to ungovernable fury and he cried " Arise and calm yourself. Who is it has dared to torture you thus? Let me have it in clear detail. Who is the fool that jabbed with his little finger at a black cobra, all ignorant of its dread power, as it lay before him innocent to all appearance, his terrible fangs all invisible? Who is the idiot that fits to his neck the noose of Death, all unwitting of the awful fate that would befall him the next moment? Who is the miserable creature that has so grievously injured you and has quaffed a full cup of Kalakoota the deadliest of all poisons, mistaking it for the elixir of life? Your strength and might, they defy thought; able to course at will through the worlds above and below, naturally endowed with the power to change your shape and form with the speed of thought, awful as Yama the lord of death, I wonder who it could be that has dared to insult you thus. I would give anything to have a sight of that mighty hero, who has deliberately set himself to mutilate you so, be he among the devas, the gandharvas or the powerful rishis. I know none in all the worlds, but Indra of the thousand eyes, that would dare to displease me. My shafts shall even now drink his life-blood, like the swan separating the milk it wants from the water; my shafts shall pierce his vital parts in battle and rob him of his life while the thirsty earth shall drink his foaming blood. Whose flesh are the hungry vultures going to feast upon

as he falls before my arrows? Once that he stands before me in fight, who can ward off his fate from the unfortunate victim?—not ever the devas, gandharvas, pisachas 35 or rakshāsas. I wonder who that wicked wight may be who had the audacity to insult and injure you thus and *that* within the confines of my kingdom. Calm yourself a bit and give me the details.”

Soorpanakha heard him out as Khara roared in 40 tones of dread wrath, and with fast-falling tears spake back in reply. “In the prime of youth they are. Of about the same age, they differ not in form or feature; their beauty defies description. But youth does not always go along with beauty; now these are not so; the 45 very God of love is but a beggar at their doors; most wonderful! their loveliness will last through life. But youth and beauty do not always go hand in hand with softness and delicacy of limb. Now, fie upon your bodies, hard as yon cruel rocks. Ah! their limbs, soft 50 as the most delicate of flowers just blown! My heart swoons to think of the exquisite joy that thrilled through me as Lakshmana touched me with his hands when he deprived me of my ears and nose. I would gladly be cut to pieces and welcome it as the greatest joy, if but 55 he lays his hands upon me once again. Infer not from this that they are weaklings, unable to satisfy the heart of the woman who seeks his embraces. Strong beyond compare they are and mighty. As a rule, general beauty of form is not always allied to symmetry and 60 grace. But hear me while I describe to you somewhat the enchanting loveliness of their eyes. Blood and fire do aptly compare with your hideous eyes. But neither the heavy stupor that betokens the Tamoguna (darkness of heart) nor the fiery red that indicates the Rajo- 65 guna (the spirit of restless activity) dare associate itself

with their large and lustrous eyes, that put to shame the petals of the white lotus and index the utter Satva-guna (spotless purity) that fills their hearts. Let be their
 70 beauty. The very dress of bark and deerskin that lie upon their body takes a new beauty unto itself in consequence. They feed on roots and fruits and, garbed like hermits, lay up dharma with restrained senses, They give it out that they are Rama and Lakshmana,
 75 the sons of King Dasaratha ; but, more like the Lords of gandharvas are they, so inconceivable is their valor and might ; yet they bear about them plainly the marks of high royalty. So I am at a loss to make them out, mortals or gods."

80 Here a wave of anxiety filled her heart as she said to herself "What if my words fill him with dread and fear and he shrinks from seeking them in battle?" So, she gave them a different meaning and said "Boys they are, strangers to arms and battle ; the sports and
 85 pleasures suited to their age engross their attention quite. Beautiful they are, their only assets that steal away the hearts of foolish girls ; but never mistake them for valiant warriors. Princes they are, who have been brought up in enervating luxury and slothful ease ;
 90 unused to pain and danger, the grim battle array would make them take to their heels. Matchless warriors, of a truth ? The very sight of your forces and yourself would drive them into hiding with the speed of thought. Pale-eyed with fear, they are tortured with the appre-
 95 hension of the terrible fate which hangs over them in retribution for what they had done to me. Have you an idea of their warlike prowess now at least ? Too poor and wretched to afford even a piece of cloth to cover their nakedness, they resort to deerskin and dress
 100 of bark ; they are indebted to the charity of the tree and

the deer ; even then they have not another piece of cloth to cover their upper limbs. They are driven by starvation to feed upon fruits and roots like the beasts of the forests ; verily they are foemen worthy of your steel, that batten on human flesh ! Dry and shrivelled they 105 are, with every organ of sense and action dead and torpid. Hermits they are, weak and impotent, that you kill by hundreds in sheer sport. They are bounden slaves to what they call dharma ; not in the least like you who own no other lord but yourself. Sons of 110 **Dasāratha** they are—that very **Dasaratha** who used to swoon away at the mention of a **rakshasa**. Brothers they are ; their supreme love toward one another is a sure guarantee that you have but to kill one to kill the other. **Rama** and **Lakshmana** are they called ; lo ! your 115 names, that speak out your manly virtues of valor, prowess, might, strength, courage, skill and fame. Is it not patent that their names but proclaim them as profound cheats that gull the weak with the witching glamour of their beauty ? Handsome of form like the 120 kings of the **gandharvas**, they have nothing in the world that they could call their own but their beauty, song and dance. They bear the marks of royalty upon their persons ; true, but it goes no further, no wealth, strength or power or forces that adorn a king. Gods 125 they might be or mortals ; but, either tremble at your name.”

Now she was seized with another anxious doubt that, if she degraded them too far, her brother might think it beneath his dignity to fight with them ; so she again 130 gave her words another meaning and said “In the flower of youth they are, a time when they are endowed in full with the energy and courage that ensure success. Beautiful they are ; let be a battle with them ; the

- 135 hearts of their enemies turn into water at the mere sight of their powerful arms, stout and strong as the trunks of elephants and reaching below the knees, their broad and leonine chests and their slender waists. Of flower-soft limbs, they consume their foes in mere sport
- 140 without troubling themselves overmuch; they never lack in strength of body, power of intellect or fertility of resource. With calm eyes and steady, they are never overtaken by fear at the sight of the enemy. Their loins are ever girt with dress of bark, ready for fight.
- 145 Their diet is spare and pure, such as conduce to give strength and hardihood to the body and peace and calm to the soul; love and hate are never engendered by it. Body, senses and mind are under perfect control, their powers ready to be concentrated on any object they
- 150 might seek to achieve. Hermits of lowly mien, yet, able to consume us to ashes with the fire of their tapas. Arms and weapons they reckon not. Loyal servants of dharma, they ever find a mighty protector in their master. Sons of Dasaratha, born to cheer him in the
- 155 winter of his life when the snows of sixty thousand years lay heavy upon his head; the mighty king whose war-chariot held unimpeded course in all quarters above and below, he who ever turned the scale of battle in favour of his friends, the devas. Surely he and his
- 160 countless hosts are behind these princes. Brothers they are, that fight with equal bravery and skill in the fore-front of battles. The eldest is known as Rama and rightly so; for, to him who charms all created beings with his manifold perfections, there is no foe possible.
- 165 Defeat or danger can never be associated with Lakshmana, whose name rightly indicates the possession of everything good and great. Fair as the kings of the gandharvas; was it not one of them, Nalakoobara, that

launched a terrible curse upon our brother Ravana ?
Endowed with every mark of royalty, they are eminent- 170
ly fitted to rule over boundless empires ; and would
they meet their death at your hands ? May be they are
the devas defeated of yore by Ravana, but who now
turn upon him backed by some mighty Power for which
they lay expectant so long. May be they are those 175
very mortals whom Ravana forgot to include in his
boons from Brahma, all out of contempt, but who now
come upon him in this guise as instruments of his
approaching doom. Between them sits a lovely Being,
in the flower and bloom of her youth, whom every 180
charm and perfection vie in crowning. It is on her
account that they treated me so, as if I were some
miserable outcast, some wicked animal. I have set my
heart upon quaffing their foaming blood on the battle
field ; and I lay it upon you as a prime duty to fulfil 185
my heart's wishes."

Thereat Khara was beside himself with wrath and,
turning to the generals of his fourteen thousand veterans
terrible as the Lord of death, thundered forth "Two
men in warlike array, but in the garb of hermits, are 190
reported to have entered our frightful Dandaka forests
and a woman with them. Bring her unto me and the
bodies of the men. My sister would drink their heart's
blood. Go forth and tarry not." And with the speed of
thought those fourteen captains of the hosts, and Soor- 195
panakha with them, bore down upon Rama and his party
like a hurricane. Rama advanced to meet them ; but
they could not approach that radiant One and held aloof,
even as wild elephants avoid forest conflagrations.

CHAPTER XX.

DEATH OF THE GENERALS.

S OORPANAKHA came within sight of the asrama of
 Rama and pointed out to the fourteen raksha-
 5 sas their victims Rama and Lakshmana, as
 they sat in their lowly hermitage with Seeta by their
 side. Raghava turned to Lakshmana whose eyes flashed
 forth baleful fires and said "Just keep careful guard
 over Seeta and I will speed the followers of yon raksha-
 10 upon their journey to the halls of Yama." "Be it so"
 replied his brother. Whereupon Rama strung his
 huge bow chased with gold and, as became a righteous
 kshatriya, said to them: "Rama and Lakshmana are we,
 the sons of king Dasaratha; we have come down to
 15 reside in these woods with the lady here.' Why seek
 you to harm us that strive to lead the life of hermits,
 subsisting on what fare the forest provides? I have
 come here in martial guise in obedience to the com-
 mands of the rishis who cry for your death at my hands.
 20 The hour is come. Stay where you are with glad hearts;
 nay, flee not unless you wish to save your wretched
 lives." But those wicked wights that ever delight in
 shedding the blood of brahmanas whirled aloft their
 tridents and roared in anger. "Dare you dream of life
 25 when the black shadow has fallen upon you of our
 master's wrath. A moment more and you are but food
 for vultures. A puny mortal you, yet seek to front
 us in battle dire, veterans grown grey in war. Nay,
 trouble yourself not to fight us but come along quietly.
 30 Our swords and maces will make short work of you and
 your bow; your courage and your life will speed hotfoot
 in merry company towards the realms of Death."

Forthwith they hurled their weapons at Raghava, who shivered them with as many arrows from his bow. Next he placed upon the bow-string fourteen narachas flaming as the sun and sharp enough to pierce through mountains, and like Indra launching his vajra at the asura hosts, did he shoot them at the hearts of the fourteen. The sinful wretches were hurled upon the earth as if a thunderbolt had smitten them. Rama's shafts clove their hearts and sunk into the earth smeared with gore. Like uprooted monarchs of the forests, they lay left of their lives, while the blood streamed in torrents from their bodies. Soorpanakha trembled in affright and with dreadful roars ran to Khara her brother. She raised her voice in doleful laments and threw herself headlong at his feet, her eyes pouring a ceaseless torrent of tears and her wounds stiffening with clotted gore like the sap flowing from lofty palms severed in two.

Thus she cast her eye over the battlefield where lay the mangled corpses of the rakshasa veterans sent to avenge her and carried the news to him that despatched them:

CHAPTER XXI.

SOORPANAKHA UPBRAIDS HER BROTHER.

KHARA blazed forth in anger as he beheld before him his favourite sister grovelling on the ground with a woe-begone countenance—the evil genius of the rakshasa clan, their fate-incarnate—and cried “Did I not send with you my foremost veterans terrible as the Lord of death? Whence these tears afresh? My men are devoted to me body and soul, loyal, ever intent on my greatness; and would they

fail me? They bring death to many an unfortunate foe, but themselves are immune from it. Then why do you writhe before me, like a wounded serpent, emitting cries and laments? It ill becomes you to wail and
 15 moan like an helpless waif and I here as your sword and shield. Arise and fear not; grief and anxiety are strangers to you."

She took heart a little at his words, wiped away her fast-falling tears and said "I came to you insulted,
 20 mutilated, and tortured with grief; and you cheered me up, despatching fourteen of your foremost warriors to slay Rama and Lakshmana. But that contemptible mortal clove their hearts with his keen shafts and sent them straight to the halls of Death. I witnessed their
 25 fate and trembled at the inconceivable might of Rama. Fear and grief whelms me quite; wherever I turn I see Rama before me. I seek refuge with you. I sink helpless in the depths of the ocean of grief, where roll the billows of fear and lurk the monsters of despair;
 30 and you leave me to my fate. I tell you that your veterans were but chaff before the fiery arrows of Rama. If you have a spark of compassion towards your faithful warriors and your favourite sister, if you have any germ of manliness and heroism in you, if you deem
 35 yourself a foeman worthy of his steel, lay low in dread fight Raghava who has vowed to destroy the rakshasas, root and branch. Else, my death lies upon your head; I fail not; I shrink not. What! still untouched with heroic fury after all I have said? It needs no oracle to tell me
 40 that your wretched self and your craven followers seek to hide your diminished head in shame and save your worthless lives. Insufferable conceit fills your heart and you let the world mistake you for a man, a rakshasa, a warrior, a king! I wonder how you fooled

them; I wonder where you managed to get that name 45
 you so disgrace. You are a living lie, a walking sham;
 a fine warrior truly, who feels himself in the grip of
 helpless awe at the mere mention of two human beetles!
 Eternal stain on the fair fame of the rakshasas! Black
 canker! has your blood turned into water? Can 50
 nothing rouse your craven spirit to action? Vile
 bastard! if your huge limbs and proud boasts are worth
 anything, go forth to meet the foe that thunders at
 your gates in the pride of his strength and valor; else,
 take your foul presence away and your worthy hench- 55
 men. You have no place here among honest warriors,
 you, living mockery. You flutter like a moth but to
 burn yourself to death at the bright fame of Rama.
 Ah! a warrior he, stern and matchless, Rama the son of
 Dasaratha! And Lakshmana, though he punished me 60
 cruelly, when shall I look upon another such?"

She beat her breast and stomach like a huge
 war-drum and voiced forth her grief in tones of rolling
 thunder.

CHAPTER XXII.

KHARA MARCHES TO BATTLE.

THIS insult, these taunts in the presence of his
 ministers, servants and warriors were too much
 for Khara; and he roared out "Boundless is 5
 my wrath at the insult laid upon you; verily,
 it passes beyond my power to control it, like the angry
 billows of the ocean when the moon calls out to them.
 Would I count him as an object worthy of my notice
 who is sure to stand face to face with Death the next 10
 moment? He has but invited his fate when he set his

foot into my realms. His audacity recoils upon himself.
 Dry up your tears ; calm the wild beatings of your heart.
 A short space and you will behold your tormentors in the
 15 gloomy halls of Yama. But I shall chop to pieces that
 human worm and give you his hot blood to drink.”
 Joy overspread the hideous countenance of Soorpana-
 kha. Her praise and acclamations were as boundless
 as her censure and taunts before ; nay, she was but a
 20 witless woman with the heart and brains of a rakshasi.
 Khara turned to Dooshana, his right hand in battle, and
 said “Order forth fourteen thousand of our troops to do
 battle with the foe. Well do I know that they read my
 heart-wishes aright ; their energy is something fright-
 25 ful and their swiftness ; never have they been known to
 turn their backs upon the enemy ; dark as winter clouds
 surcharged with rain, their radiance playing through
 them like lambent lightnings, cruel of heart and crueller
 of act, they ever delight in the agony and pain of others.
 30 Of immense strength of body, fierce and restless as
 tigers, with deep cavernous mouths and fathomless
 energy, they are experts in the use of every weapon.
 They go in advance and that as quick as thought.
 Bring forth my war-chariot furnished with bows, arrows,
 35 swords, spears and other warlike gear. The hero of a
 hundred fights, I lead my old war-dogs and make mince-
 meat of Rama and his wicked brother.” Dooshana lost
 not a moment in bringing round the war-chariot of his
 master to the gates. Its splendour dazzled the eyes
 40 even as the noon-day sun ; steeds of diverse hue and
 beautiful were yoked to it ; it towered aloft like mount
 Meru and lost itself in the skies ; capacious beyond
 conception, it was adorned with molten gold and gems
 and rested upon wheels of gold and yoke-poles studded
 45 with diamonds. Cunningly wrought figures of gold

graced it of fishes, flowers, trees, mountains, planets and auspicious birds. Golden bells chimed sweetly all over it; flags, bannerets and pennons waved over it and lost themselves in the skies; it was amply equipped with every warlike gear. Khara got into it and his rakshasas ranged themselves around him, as also Dooshana. He commanded the captains of his hosts to start as they stood expectant in their chariots, their gemmed armour and terrible weapons giving back the rays of the sun. The rakshasa army left Janasthana with a mighty shout; the earth quaked in affright; bars of iron and steel, broadswords, javelins, tridents, battle-axes, scimitars, discuses, spears, batons, maces and huge bows resembling the vajra of Indra were found among them, with many a terrible engine of destruction; it pleased the heart of Khara mightily to see it and he commanded his chariot to proceed fast. Mad with fury and the lust of war, sending forth terrible roars and war-cries, Khara urged on his charioteer; intent on annihilating his foes, in hideous and diabolical glee, even like the God of destruction who turns the hearts of beings into water, a tornado driving with mighty force a huge cloud-bank that showers stones was not more terrible. And lo, his war-chariot consumed the miles that lay between it and Panchavati with the speed of thought and all quarters trembled at it.

CHAPTER XXIII.

EVIL OMENS.

AND upon that rakshasa army marching forth to battle in high spirits, there rained blood from vast clouds ashen in colour like asses. The

horses yoked to the chariot of Khara stumbled and fell suddenly in the smooth high-road strewn with soft flowers. The sun was surrounded by a black ring slightly red at the edges, as if a huge fire-brand was
10 whirled aloft; an immense vulture with a mountain-like body perched on the flagshaff of gold and cried hideously. Carnivorous beasts and birds drew near Janasthana howling and crying most fearfully. Packs of jackals howled at the sun and indicated the impending doom
15 of the rakshasas. Huge clouds hid the sky and rained torrents of blood, like mountains shorn of their wings by the bolts of Indra. A boundless pall of darkness spread over the earth and hid everything from view. The evening twilight announced itself too early, like
20 garments soaked in blood. Vultures, eagles, jackals and other ominous creatures stood against Khara's chariot and howled dreadfully, messengers of his approaching fate. Hordes of jackals howled in front of the troops, emitting flames from their mouths, sure prophets
25 of the defeat and destruction of the rakshasas. A headless trunk, like a huge log, rose to view near the sun. Rahu enveloped the bright luminary in his dark folds when the eclipses were not due. A fierce gale beat upon their faces; the sun grew dim and dull; stars
30 rained from the sky like glow-worms, though it was not night; the lotuses in the pools faded and shrivelled; the fish hid themselves from view; a red dust rose from the earth to the sky like a red cloud, though there was not a breath of air; linnets and other slight birds
35 screamed and screeched; fire-brands fell from the sky amidst whirlwinds and thunderous claps; the earth quaked and the mountains and forests upon it; the right hand of Khara twitched as he sat in his chariot shouting his war-cries; his accents trembled and grew

indistinct; tears rained from his eyes; pains shot 40
through his forehead. But brutish obstinancy and
ignorance were proof against these ill omens and many
others and Khara went not back. His heart was not
in the least troubled at these blood-curdling signs of
evil; he laughed hideously and said to his rakshasas, 45
“Weaklings are trampled beneath the iron heels of
giants; so do I place my feet on the neck of these
omens. My keen shafts will compel the heavens to
rain stars in a glittering cascade; roused to fury, I will
place the neck of Yama under the noose of Death, and 50
he, the terror and destroyer of all creatures. I go not
back except with the heads of these Rama and Laksh-
mana in their little self-conceit; my sister shall quaff
her fill of their heart-blood to her delight; she is their
Fate. Ill success has ever been an utter stranger to 55
me and you know it. Do I speak true? It is sport for
me to slay Indra as he advances to battle on his mad-
dened Airavata with uplifted vajra. Verily, I degrade
myself by bestowing a thought on these human
insects.” The huge army rent the welkin with joy- 60
ous shouts; for, was not the noose of Yama tightening
itself round their throats?”

Rishis, devas, gandharvas, siddhas and charanas
came down to witness the battle and said to one another
“May all good betide cows, brahmanas and those that 65
ever work for the welfare of all beings. May Raghu-
veera annihilate these rakshasas, even as Mahavishnu
of yore hacked th pieces the asura hosts;” and from
their aerial cars they looked down on the vast army
that was fated to be, ere long, guests in the halls of 70
Death. Khara drove on in hot haste and was closely
followed by his ministers Syenagami, Prithugreeva,
Yagnasatru, Vihangama, Durjaya, Karaveeraksha,

Parusha, Kalakarmuka, Meghamali, Mahamali, Sarpas-
 75 ya, and Rudhirasana. Dooshana had in his train four
 generals named Mahakapala, Sthoolaksha, Pramathi
 and Trisiras; those mighty rakshasa veterans were
 filled with the lust of battle and proceeded to where the
 princes abode, like cruel planets banded together against
 80 the sun and the moon.

CHAPTER XXIV.

RAMA PREPARES HIMSELF.

RAMA noted the evil omens that befell the rak-
 shasas and said "Lakshmana! these betoken
 misery to men and fear to all beings, not to
 speak of the annihilation of the rakshasas.
 Behold yon fearful clouds, ashen in hue like asses, sail
 aloft in the skies in circles, raining torrents of blood to
 the accompaniment of thunder and lightning. And
 10 mark you the auspicious signs that forerun our victory
 over the rakshasas? My huge bow chased with gold,
 quivers in impatience as it where, eagerly expectant
 as myself of the approaching battle; the arrows emit
 angry smoke. The cries of these birds tell us that
 15 there draws near us some mighty fear or terrible danger
 to us. The constant twitching of my right arm indi-
 cates some terrible battle close upon us; victory is
 ours therein and our foes shall not triumph. Your face
 is radiant beyond expression; that is another sign of
 20 success. The dim lack-lustre faces of those that proceed
 to battle foretell the shortening of their span of life.
 The shouts and war-cries of the rakshasas and the dull
 thunder of their war-drums are drawing near us. The
 wise man and prudent ever reads the future danger

by significant signs and provides against it. So, 25
stay in yon mountain cave concealed by thick foliage
and, armed to the teeth, watch over the safety of
Seeta. I know full well your eagerness to meet these
rakshasas in battle. A mighty warrior you are and
valiant; and these have the hall-mark of Fate upon 30
them. Yet, I have passed my word to the rishis that
I would slay them; gainsay me not. By my feet I
adjure you; delay not."

Accordingly Lakshmana armed himself and with-
drew into the cave along with Seeta. It pleased Rama 35
mightily that his brother was the soul of perfect
loyalty and obedience; and he donned his armour.
Like a smokeless flame on a dark night, shone he in his
divine armour of fiery refulgence; he prepared his
bow and arrows, shook the affrighted quarters with the 40
twang of his bow and calmly awaited the arrival of his
foes. Devas, gandharvas, siddhas, charanas, devarshis
and brahmarshis in the worlds above and below came
down to witness the terrible fight and said to one
another. "All good betide cows, brahmanas and 45
those that ever desire the welfare of beings. May
Raghuveera destroy these rakshasas, even as Maha-
vishnu consumed of yore the asuras with his flaming
chakra." All beings trembled in mighty fear at the
sight of Rama as he stood on the field of battle shining 50
in his lustre like the Lord of time. No one dared
lift his eyes to him as he stood there in unparalleled
splendour, even as Rudra when he starts on the Day of
Dissolution to accomplish his dread task of with-
drawing into himself the whole universe. 55

By this time the rakshasa hosts drew near. A fearful
sight it was as it marched, like the stormy ocean that
foams and roars when the Lords of day and night call

her to their side—their hideous armour, weapons,
60 banners and instruments of martial music. Some
roared like lions; some boasted to one another that
Rama and Lakshmana were but poor meat for them;
some bent their bows and shook the quarters with
the noise of their twang; some stretched themselves
65 and cracked their joints in the idle languor that follows
upon immense strength when it rusts out of inaction;
some sent continual grunts and humphs; others sound-
ed drums and other warlike instruments. All these
rose in one mighty volume of sound from the woods and
70 put to flight the beasts and birds therein. They fled
to where those frightful sounds fell not on their ears and
never turned to look at their former haunts. At the
sight of the hosts of Khara drawing towards him with
mighty speed like the ocean that had burst its bounds,
75 Raghuveera cast his eyes all round, grasped his bow,
drew out the shafts from the quiver and, soul of compas-
sion that he was, invested himself with a consuming
wrath, only to destroy those that seek to harm his
flock. Nay, the very Spirits of the forests ran away
80 from their immemorial haunts in unspeakable fear,
unable to raise their eyes to where stood Raghuveera
in the splendour of his wrath, even as the Fire of uni-
versal dissolution. More like Rudra shone he when he
started to destroy the sacrifice of Daksha the foolish
85 and haughty.

Then as the rakshasa forces faced the solitary
warrior in the pride of their countless weapons, fiery
armours, ornaments and banners, it presented the
appearance of dun clouds spread over the sky against
90 the morning sun.

CHAPTER XXV.

RAMA AND THE RAKSHASAS.

KHARA and his hosts approached the hermitage and beheld Rama as he stood there bow in hand in his all-consuming wrath. Khara deemed it but child's work for him to conquer the man and ordered his charioteer to drive him to the spot. His ministers and warriors followed him with deafening war-cries to where stood Reghuveera idly fingering his bow ; and like the fiery Mars looked he in the midst of the constellations. Next, Khara shot a stream of arrows at Rama and roared like a lion. The *rakshasas* were beside themselves with anger and directed a dark cloud, seemingly endless, of huge maces, broadswords, tridents, javelins, scimitars and battle-axes on Rama, all unknowing that his terrible bow was but the noose of Yama that was tightening round their necks and dragging them helpless to the darkest and deepest hells. From the backs of mountainous elephants, fleet chargers and gorgeous chariots they rained a ceaseless torrent of arrows on Rama with deadly intent, like huge clouds advancing upon the sun with thunder and lightning ; but not one of those missiles reached the solitary foe, like raindrops shattering themselves to death on the black merciless rocks. As the calm waves of the ocean stay the rushing waters of the rivers gently yet firmly, Rama kept back their arrowy torrents with his keen-edged shafts and consumed them to nothing. Shot at and riven in every part of his body by those weapons of his foes, like a lofty mountain riven by the flaming bolts of Indra, Raghuveera felt not the slightest distress. Covered with wounds and bleeding from every

pore, he shone like the evening sun hemmed in by cloud-banks; whereat the *devas* and the *rishis* lost heart.

The next moment Rama blazed with wrath, drew his terrible bow almost to a circle and despatched thousands of feathered shafts at the foe. They were irresistible, unbearable; they fell on the *rakshasa* host like the rod of Death, and drew to his hall the lives of those wicked demons like the bonds of Fate; they clove the hearts of the cannibals and, dripping with gore, rose aloft in the skies like tongues of fire. From out the bow of Rama they sprang in to view by thousands, lakhs and crores, vomiting dreadful flames which the lives of the *rakshasas* fanned to a white heat; they had to be quick indeed to despatch to the abode of Yama bows, banners, armours, heads, arms huge as the trunks of elephants and graced with priceless gems and gold, thighs, horses yoked to chariots glittering with precious stones, charioteers, cars, elephants, horses and their drivers and footsoldiers to keep them company. Hacked to pieces by *naleekas*, *vikarmis* and other varieties of arrows, the *rakshasas* howled most fearfully. Pierced to the heart with keen shafts, the *rakshasa* host was sore afflicted, like a dry and withered forest at the touch of the bright God of fire.

But some of them, of frightful strength and valor, fought their way to Rama and hurled at him their tridents, swords, axes and other weapons. Raghava shivered them to pieces with his arrows and shore off their hideous heads. They fell to the earth with shattered crowns, broken corselets and bows, like huge trees uprooted by the gales arising from the wings of Garuda; those that remained were terror-struck at the sight and sought refuge with Khara, their lord. Then

Dooshana calmed their fears, rallied them and came down upon Ramachandra, even as the grim God of death ran at, of yore, the wielder of Pinaka. They drew fresh courage and hope from Dooshana and bore down upon 70 Rama, discharging a continuous downpour of huge trees, arrows, rocks, tridents, rods and bars of steel and iron. Verily, a fearful sight it was and wonderful, that fight between the lone warrior and the countless hosts of *rakshasas* that hemmed him on all sides. Nearer and 75 yet nearer they drew with fire-flashing eyes and preceded by their cruel messengers of death and destruction; beholding which, Rama gave a shout that shook the worlds above and below, and fitted a *gandharvastra* to his bow that shone like the sun; for he had decided to 80 wipe them off the face of the earth. At once from out of the circled bow there sprang arrows countless and hid the earth and sky and the quarters. The *rakshasas* were pierced through and through and could never see when Rama took his shafts or set or shot them; 85 their supreme misery was enough and more to occupy their attention. The pall of utter darkness wiped off from view the sky, the sun and the quarters; alone Rama stood revealed, every time the deadly shafts left the bow with lightning radiance. There was no inter- 90 val, not the slightest, between their fall, the outrush of the life-breaths and the toppling down of the mutilated corpses. At one and the same moment the *rakshasas* were hurled on the earth, transfixed each and every one of them. Some were sore wounded; some struck the 95 earth like thunder claps; as they fell some hovered between life and death; some were clean cut in two; some were chopped into mince-meat; some were torn to ribbons. And so, that arrowy sleet from Ragha-va's bow scattered all over that dread field of battle in 100

horrible and fantastic groupings, turbaned heads, uncovered polls, gaily adorned hands, double-jointed thighs, stout legs, elephants, horses, chariots, *chamaras*, cloud-like umbrellas, fans, banners, tridents, broad-
 105 swords, scimitars, spears, battle-axes and huge pieces of rock. Who can ever dare to describe in poor words the might of Rama's arrows ?

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE DEATH OF DOOSHANA.

INCENSED at the total annihilation of his army, Dooshana despatched five thousand *rakshasas* of
 5 matchless speed and energy who never turned their backs to the enemy and whom none ever dared to stand against. They hemmed in Rama and kept up a ceaseless shower of tridents, broadswords, rocks, arrows and trees ; whereat Rama stopped them midway
 10 with his keen darts and, like a mad bull, closed his eyes and resolved to wipe the *rakshasas* off the face of the earth. Fire shot from his careless and contemptuous glances as he discharged cruel shafts everywhere and put to shameful rout Dooshana and his followers.
 15 In turn, the night-ranger pierced Rama with sharp arrows like thunder-bolts ; it annoyed Raghava rather too much and he was disgusted at this useless tussle with the *rakshasa* ; so with one arrow he shivered the bow, with four the horses yoked to the car, with an
 20 half-moon the head of the driver and with three he transfixed the heart of Dooshana. At one stroke was he deprived of bow, horses, chariot and driver ; he leaped to the earth lightly and, grasping a pike huge and frightful as a mountain peak, he sprang upon

Rama. The *deva* hosts quaked at the sight of that 25
strange missile decked with golden bands, studded with
iron spikes and smeared with the heart-flesh of
countless hosts. Numerous towns, fortresses and gates
have been shivered to atoms thereby. Two arrows and
only two shot out from Rama's bow to meet Dooshana 30
as he sped with that weapon raised aloft, frightful as
the serpent of doom or the *vajra* of Indra; his huge
arms were clean lopped off and he fell to the earth like
an Indradhwaja or a broken-tusked elephant.

• Shouts of acclamation and praise arose from all 35
beings. Meanwhile there bore down upon the lone war-
rior Mahakapala with a massive trident, Sthoolaksha
with whirling broadsword, Pramathi with axe uplifted,
as if they were driven to their doom in the leash of
Fate. They received a warm and lavish hospitality 40
befitting such honoured guests—sharp arrows took off
the head of Mahakapala; Pramathi was riddled like a
sieve and fell like a tall tree with out-spreading boughs;
the huge-eyed Sthoolaksha could no more boast of them;
and the six thousand *rakshasas* were despatched to the 45
world of Yama by as many arrows.


The sudden extinction of Dooshana and his forces
roused Khara to ungovernable fury and he cried to the
captains of his hosts "Dooshana and his mighty war-
riors have been blasted by Rama; so, advance with an 50
irresistible army and bring me the head of that insignifi-
cant insect." Then Syenagami, Prithugreeva, Yagna-
satsu, Vihangama, Durjaya, Karaveeraksha, Parusha,
Kalakarmuka, Meghamali, Mahamali, Sarpasya and
Rudhirasana, the twelve leaders of his forces, came at 55
Rama and discharged their weapons at him in a cease-
less downpour. But, they were met, every one of them,
by an arrow from Rama's bow, gold-banded, vomiting

flames and shrouded in smoke; as tall trees struck by
 60 the bolt of Indra, they fell to the earth with shivered
 armour, broken bows, shattered crowns, tumbled hair
 and streaming wounds; they carpeted the ground like
 a sacrificial altar strewn with the sacred *kusa* grass.
 In one short moment that vast forest was rendered
 65 voiceless and covered with the carcasses of *rakshasas*;
 blood coursed in torrents through it, giving it the
 appearance of a large city.

Then, there advanced the fourteen thousand *raks-*
hasas diversely mounted and variously armed, all against
 70 that single foe; and them did a puny mortal despatch
 to the halls of Yama in the winking of an eye, as he
 stood on the ground behind his circling bow. Of that
 spreading host there survived but Khara, and Trisiras
 and in front of them stood Rama, the Fate of the
 75 *rakshasa* race; the other war-worn veterans were con-
 sumed by the prowess of Raghava. "It will not do to
 neglect the foe thus" cried Khara, as he beheld but
 empty space where a moment ago stood his embat-
 tled hosts and he drove his car at Rama like Indra with
 80 his upraised bolt.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE DEATH OF TRISIRAS.

HEN Trisiras, the other general of Khara, barred
 his way and spoke over joined palms "Lord!
 this rashness is all unmeet. What has be-
 come of me that *you* should mind such pin-
 pricks? Send me upon this task and in a moment yon
 Rama is no more. I return not until it is decided
 which of us two is the Fate of the other; and this I

swear upon my weapon. Rest awhile an amused spect- 10
ator and enjoy the sport. Go joyfully back to Janas-
thana if Rama falls; have it out with him if he
survives.” He prayed for his own death, which was
even then speeding towards him. Khara gave him glad
permission thereto. Like a huge mountain with three 15
crests, he advanced upon Rama in his spacious car that
shook the earth, roaring like a wet war-drum or dark
clouds. Raghava lost no time in stemming the torrent
of arrows that rolled down from his mountainous bow.

• A frightful battle ensued thereafter between Rama 20
and Trisiras; they were endowed with marvellous
strength and resembled towering elephants or lions.
Three shafts of Trisiras pierced the forehead of Rama
and he exclaimed in mighty anger “ And so, this is the
utmost you can put forth of your strength and you call 25
yourself a veteran *rakshasa* warrior! May be you want-
ed to offer three delicate flowers in worship of me. Here!
just have an idea of *my* gifts.” With fourteen shafts
like serpents of doom did he cleave the heart of his
enemy; four darts drank the lives of the four horses; 30
eight took away the head of the driver and another cut
in two the proud flagstaff. Trisiras leaped from his car,
but Rama was too quick for him and pierced his heart
again and again; and as he stood dazed for a while, three
arrows took off his three heads. Reft of life, he fell to 35
the earth vomiting streams of blood. Like a herd of
deer at the sight of the terrible tiger, his followers
vanished from view; whereat Khara waxed wroth,
rallied them and ran at Rama, as Rahu essays to swal-
low the bright moon. 40

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A DUEL BETWEEN RAMA AND KHARA.

A vague fear took hold of Khara when he saw Raghuveera of unknown might annihilate Doo-
 5 shana, Trisiras and the *rakshasa* host. His pride had a pitiable fall as he glanced at the mutilated remnants of the fourteen thousand redoubtable warriors that followed him to battle. He attacked Rama even as Namuchi the *asura* fronted Indra and struck
 10 him with *narachas* cruel as deadly black cobras. An expert in the science of the bow, he twanged it frequently and showed a wonderful fight, covering all quarters with diverse magical weapons. At once Rama despatched from his *kodanda* (bow) countless shafts
 15 vomiting flames and hid the sky from view. Thus with deadly intent they kept up a ceaseless shower of keen-edged arrows like rain-clouds full to bursting; and the sun was shorn of his brilliance. Then Khara pierced Rama with *naleekas*, *narachas*, *vikarnis* and other
 20 curious shafts even as sharp goads that prod a mighty elephant. All creatures trembled at the sight of the *rakshasa* as he stood in his car, bow in hand like Yama that advances to destroy the entire creation noose in hand Rama, of boundless valour, decided to destroy all
 25 the night-rangers and idly leant on his bow; which Khara mistook for fatigue and dispiritedness, and ran at him roaring like a mad lion, but Rama heeded him not in the least. Then as a moth that seeks the deadly flame, the *rakshasa* neared his foe and exhibited his skill by sever-
 30 ing his bow close to the grasp; and followed with seven arrows that fell like thunderbolts and shivered the armour of Raghava. Then Rama shone like millions of

suns in his supreme naked beauty. Quick as thought, thousands of shafts pierced Rama in every pore, to the accompaniment of leonine roars. 35

Rama shone with greater splendour even as Rudra at the time of Universal dissolution or a smokeless flame ; he set his heart upon the destruction of Khara ; he grasped the mighty bow of Vishnu, the priceless gift of Agastya, drew it to his ear, and with innumerable arrows, crooked in their joints, he cut down the flag of Khara that, decked with gold and gems, towered aloft like a mountain peak ; it fell to the earth with a deafening noise, as if the sun was hurled to the earth through the dread curses of the *devas*. At once Khara 45 went mad with rage and, as the hunters pierce a mad elephant with harpoons, struck at the vital parts of Rama with four excellent shafts. Blood poured in torrents from every part of his body, which roused Rama to uncontrollable wrath ; he grasped his bow and sent 50 one half-moon shaft at Khara's head, two at his hands and three at his heart ; as the moment drew near of his death, he selected thirteen *narachas*, one of which shattered the yoke pole, four the horses, one the driver, three the wheels, two the axle and one the bow ; he 55 rounded it off with another that transfixed Khara, roaring the while like an enraged lion. Deprived of bow, horses, driver and chariot, Khara leapt from it and sprang upon Rama whirling a mace huge as a mountain peak. Then, the *devas* and *maharshis* that crowded 60 the sky with their cars rejoiced mightily and lauded Rama with acclamations of joy.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A WAR OF WORDS.

RAMA'S heart was filled with pity as he looked at
 Khara who stood before him careless and with no
 5 other weapon but his club, and said to himself,
 "Alas! he has tried every means possible and failed.
 God grant him a clearer vision. Let me try him some-
 what;" and he advised him in words whose pitiless
 logic and reasoning went home like spear-thrusts:
 10 "In the proud enjoyment of every comfort and luxury,
 in the midst of your countless rakshasa hosts, you
 perpetrated deeds of cruelty and earned the scorn and
 contempt of all. A man may be the undisputed lord of
 the three worlds; yet, if he be cruel, sinful and a terror
 15 to all beings, he cannot hope to live even for a moment.
 Men destroy him who is ever bent on the ruin and
 misery of others, even as they crush a serpent wherever
 they come upon it. He who blackens himself with sin
 and repents not, be his motive to acquire some thing
 20 or to preserve a former acquisition, reaps a fitting
 harvest, like the reptile that swallows hailstones; and
 he loses his wealth and power into the bargain. Do
 you hope for the worlds of bliss hereafter, after your
 cruel slaughter of the righteous hermits of Dandaka?
 25 Miserable sinners are dogged in future births by the
 results of their acts. Cruel men cannot hope to enjoy
 for long the wealth and power they have earned by
 some slight merit in the past; their fate is well-nigh
 upon them. As trees put forth flowers and fruits in
 30 due season, sinners receive their wages not a moment
 too soon or too late. As poisoned food kills the eater
 thereof in no time, heinous sins fructify soonest. The

emperor Dasaratha has despatched me here but to destroy the wretches that seek to bring terror and sorrow to all creatures. As great serpents pierce into 35 the anthills, the shafts from my bow will transfix your heart and drink your life-blood. I will send you and your hosts after the holy Ones of Dandaka whom you have foully slain. Behold your victims ranged on high in their *vimanas*; they shall be witnesses to the exquisite 40 torments of the damned that my shafts will inflict upon you. Put forth your strength and skill to the utmost; fight to the very last; it is but child's play for me to lop off your head as if it were the ripe fruit of the palm."

The cruel taunts of Rama struck home; Khara was 45 beside himself with rage and his eyes flashed fire as he roared with a thunderous laugh "Puny mortal! pride not yourself upon the easy victory you had over a parcel of street *rakshasas*, the scum and refuse of the class. Excellent breeding to blow your own trum- 50 pet and blare your impotence! Heroes and lords of men are never blind with pride and strength; they are never guilty of brag; it is left to degraded specimens of the *kshatriyas* like yourself, mean and cowardly. Know you of any noble warrior that descants upon his high 55 lineage when Death brushes him with his wings on the field of battle? The weak fire that runs along the grass looks like gold, but can it scorch anything? Even so, the braggart looks very like a hero at the moment, but betrays the coward in him. His acts bear no relation 60 to his words. You are one of them. Have a full view of me as I stand here, mace in hand, like an impregnable mountain veined with diverse ore. Am I not enough to take charge of your life-breaths? Are you sure that I will not draw them away from you like 65 Yama who casts his dread noose round the creatures in

the three words? Verily you are beneath notice, beneath contempt. I have closed but one chapter of what a boaster deserves at my hands; but the sun
 70 hangs low in the west and it is time that this farce of a fight drew to a finish; hence I reserve my comments. *Rakshasas* wax in strength at nights and men wane correspondingly. It is a holiday-task for me to crush you out of existence then; but I refrain, as it would
 75 cast a slur on me. My warriors whom you have wantonly killed call upon me to avenge them; and the tears of their kin shall flow no more." He emphasised his resolve by whirling his club aloft and threw it at Rama with deadly intent. That worderful weapon
 80 blazed like a flaming fire and fell from the sky like a thunderbolt, consuming to ashes everything around, whereat Rama shattered it to atoms with his arrows. Like a deadly serpent reft of its power and life by *mantras* and magical herbs, the mace, dreadful as the
 85 noose of Death, fell to the earth.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE DEATH OF KHARA.

WEAPONLESS and defenceless stood Khara in bewildered confusion; it was all unjust to slay him
 5 then. So, Rama said to him with a smile, "Dog of a *rakshasa*! have you reached the limits of your strength? Weaklings should never play at brag. There lies your boasted club shivered to pieces by my shafts. Words, empty words, barren of any act, are
 10 your sole assets. You vowed to wipe off the tears of the kinsmen of those that met their death at my hands; right nobly have you kept your vow.

Garuda of yore deprived Indra of the treasured Waters of Immortality; even so, I will pluck the life-breaths from your mean and boasting heart and invite the 15 thirsty earth to drink its fill of your foaming and bubbling blood. I behold you embrace the earth with outstretched arms and dusty limbs, as if you clasped your darling wife to your heart. When you are in the murky hells, the *rishis* of Dandaka, till now helpless, 20 will range the woods fearlessly. My arrows shall annihilate your forces and Janasthana shall be the safe home of hermits. Your women, that had been a terror to others till now, will flee their haunts in tears and laments, reft of their kith and kin. Your 25 wives that knew not pain and misery and revelled in torturing others, will now have a correct and clear idea of grief and sorrow, but will not share in the joys and pleasures of mortals. Cruel hearted! base-born! coward! mortal foe of the *brahmanas*! our sages offer 30 their libations to the fire with trembling hands, all out of fear of you." Thus, with words sharper and crueller than his shafts, did Rama pierce Khara, until the giant could bear it no more.

He roared in mad fury "You are utterly blinded 35 with pride and conceit; fear and danger have their grip on your throat, yet you see it not. The shadow of Death grows upon you and hence these insensate ravings. The noose of Death tightens round the necks of mortals; it bewilders the senses, confuses the intel- 40 lect and leads them to strange acts of folly." He knit his brows in a terrible frown, uprooted a huge *sala* tree that stood near, bit his lips in concentrated rage and hurled it at Rama, shouting "That finishes you." But, it was chopped to fragments by Raghava's arrows. 45 He grew tired of fighting with Khara; rage filled

his heart to see that the *rakshasa* was not touched by grief, remorse or nobler instincts, though he stood defenceless on the brink of death; a heavy sweat
 50 covered his limbs; his eyes were tinged with a fiery red; and he clove the huge frame of the giant with many a shaft. Blood flowed in torrents from the mountainous bulk, but Khara, though dazed for a while, ran at Rama, blind with the lust of blood. He was too
 55 near for Raghava to bend his bow or place a shaft on the string and so he had to take a hurried step back; besides, he was almost drenched with the streams of blood that flowed from the giant's body.

Next, he shot at his heart an arrow given him by
 60 Indra, terrible as the Fire of dissolution or the rod of Brahma. Charged with a fatal mission, it fell on the *rakshasa's* breast with a thunderous roar; consumed by the flames thereof, he fell to the earth like Yama of yore, reduced to ashes at Swetaranya by the fire from
 65 the eyes of Rudra; like Vritra the *asura*, struck by the *vajra*, he gave up his life to the unerring shaft of Rama; like Namuchi the *asura*, killed by a flake of foam, he was destroyed in mere sport; like Vala, the *asura* who fronted Indra, he was but a name.

70 Then, the *rajarshis* and the *brahmarshis* assembled there honoured and lauded Rama to the skies, out of the joy that filled their hearts. "Best and foremost of the line of Raghu! it was for this that Mahendra came down to the *asrama* of Sarabhangā; it was for this that
 75 you paid a visit to the abodes of Suteekshna, Agastya and others. Sarabhangā sent you to the hermitage of Suteekshna that you might be close to Janasthana; he sped you on to Agastya's; he directed you to abide at Panchavati. The hermits took you to their
 80 dwellings only to bring you nearer Khara; it was for

this that Agastya was entrusted with the divine weapons; it was to arrange all this with the *rishis* that Indra came down to Dandaka. You have accomplished what we prayed of you; you have destroyed these cruel wretches; henceforth *maharshis* will roam 85 fearlessly in this forest and observe their *dharma*." And as they were speaking, the heavenly hosts arrived there and rained flowers of divine fragrance upon Rama, to the accompaniment of celestial drums and martial music. "It was but one short hour" 90 exclaimed they "and fourteen thousand *rakshasa* veterans sped hotfoot after their leaders Khara, Doo-shana and Trisiras to the halls of Death, despatched thither by the keen arrows of Rama the solitary warrior, who stood on his native earth fronting his 95 fierce foes diversely mounted! Unfathomable, inconceivable is his might and valour, his deftness and courage; we but saw the like of it with Mahavishnu, the wielder of the discus." They took respectful leave of Rama and went back to their homes on high. 100

Meanwhile Lakshmana came out with Seeta from the mountain cave and rejoiced to see the work of Rama's hands; he led his redoubtable brother back to the *asrama* while the *maharshis* showered every mark of respect and admiration upon the marvellous victor. 105

Seeta was filled with anxious fears as to the result of a battle between a single mortal with fourteen thousand terrible *rakshasas*; but when she beheld him destroy them in the short space of an hour, she—the scion of noble *kshatriyas* who could rightly appraise 110 the worth of famous warriors—admired his prowess and rewarded him with a fond embrace. It was her first view of her lord on the battle-field or in actual fight; so, she gazed upon him with never-satisfied eyes

115 after the battle was over and drank of the ineffable
 beauty of the Lord of worlds as he shone with the halo
 of victory playing around him. Blood flowed in
 streams from the countless wounds inflicted by arrows,
 weapons, rocks and trees; drops of sweat stood in every
 120 pore; slightly fatigued, he put off his armour and leant
 a little on his terrible bow as if to rest himself. And
 who but Seeta more deserving to behold and enjoy the
 divine loveliness of the Guardian of the worlds? It
 was given to none but Lakshmana and Seeta to
 125 behold the vision of Raghunatha, his matted coils
 held together by slender creepers, the exhaustless
 quivers hanging from his shoulders, his countenance
 gradually overspread with the sweetness and grace that
 chased away the fire of wrath that consumed the *raksha-*
 130 *sas*, as he gazed wistfully at the path down which
 Lakshmana and Seeta were coming, while he shot a
 glance now and then out of the corner of his eyes to
 note if the foe was coming back? Time and oft had
 Seeta heard from others of the wonderful hero, her
 135 lord, but she had never an occasion to witness it for
 herself. Ah! what rare merit did she achieve to be
 blessed with a sight of Rghava as he was returning
 slightly fatigued from the scene of his marvellous
 deeds! You saw his arrows, but guessed at the count-
 140 less hosts before him only by the fast-falling corpses;
 you saw his foes hurled to the earth lifeless, but it
 was impossible to make out when he drew his arrows
 from the quiver or fitted them to the string or shot
 them from it. Wonderful to see, they always sought
 145 the hearts of the *rakshasas* and never approached
 the hosts of the *devas* and *rishis* that stood with
 them in a confused crowd. Were the *maharshis*
 powerless to punish their persecutors? No, their

marvellous tapas would, in a moment, consume the the rakshasa creation to ashes. But, they feared that 150 it would detract from the fame and glory of the Lord as the Protector of the universe and placed their faith in the promise of Rama to them and in his faithfulness to the dharma of championing those that seek refuge of him. Was he not the Soul of compassion 155 who exterminated the wretches and brought untold joy to the hearts of the hermits who wailed " Behold the bodies of the rishis cruelly have been that tortured by the rakshasas of Dandaka ? " Seeta's wifely heart was filled with dread anxiety and she hovered between life 160 and death to hear the terrible shouts and sounds of the foes but no sign of Rama the solitary warrior ; she saw him again and drew fresh life from his loving glances, the Fountain of life and energy of the entire universe. " The wife is the soul of the husband " says the Sruti ; 165 and she was an apt illustration of it, in that she was full of life and energy in his presence alone. She flew on the wings of speed with an anxious heart to behold her husband return a victor from the field of battle and her hair stood on end out of the joy she could not control. 170 No wonder that the daughter of Janaka, the warrior-king of Mithila, could appreciate and admire the valour of a hero.

Then, love overmastered her and, careless of appearances, she clasped Rama in a fond embrace. May be 175 it was a deserved reward for his taking upon himself *her* duty of protecting the worlds as the Mother of Mercy. May be that she, whose lightest glance out of the corner of her eyes chases away all evil and sorrow and confers all good and joy, desired to relieve the pain 180 and agony of the countless wounds inflicted upon Rama's person by the shafts, weapons and missiles of

the rakshasas and fondly folded the body of Raghuveera in her flower-soft arms.

- 185 Every one of the enemy saw a Rama before him on the field of battle; but, when the fight was over, he resumed his mortal form. May be that Seeta embraced him out of the wonder that filled her heart. Fourteen thousand warriors stood embattled whom
- 190 Indra and his devas were powerless to cope with; and them did her lord annihilate in light sport, alone, on foot, in about two hours, and with no danger or harm to himself; once before at Ayodhya she had, all unknowingly, taunted him and said "Alas! my father
- 195 has ruined my life by giving me to you as wife, mistaking you for a *man*. He knew not that you are an impotent, powerless, unsexed thing. Ah! I am lost;" now, she realised her terrible mistake and was tortured with a desire to make some reparation for it;
- 200 may be that she cast aside the modesty and gentleness natural to her sex and, all uninvited, embraced him warmly. "Lord! have you not given your word to come down in every *yuga* to champion the good, destroy the wicked and restore dharma? Right well have
- 205 you fulfilled it by destroying these cruel fiends and steeped the hearts of the sages in ineffable bliss by granting them to behold your divine beauty. You have nobly deigned to give an ear to the cries of our helpless children; your promise to wipe the rakshasas off the
- 210 earth and confer joy and safety upon the world, was no empty meaningless speech meant to quiet the importunate cries of children; it has all come true. I see no way they could manifest their gratitude to you, the Lord of the myriad worlds. I beheld you
- 215 bestow upon Lakshmana your fond embrace as the giver of everything that the heart could desire; and it

was because you were at a loss to make him any fitter return for his having raised at Panchavati a cottage as your heart would have it. Even so I speak for my children and reward you thus for your immeasurable 220 valour and prowess." May be it was when she drew him to her breast in fond embrace.

She was overjoyed to see the countless corpses floating along the rivers of blood and Rama standing there safe and smiling. She heard the sages 225 now past all danger, laud Rama to the skies; her face brightened like the full moon and, unable to contain her overwhelming love for him, she embraced him once more. Said she to herself "Would I enjoy this pleasure if I were not born the daughter of Janaka? 230 Would Raghava clasp my hand in wedlock, if I were not born of the line of the Videhas? Would he draw me to himself with the hand that holds the terrible bow and clasp me in loving embrace along with the Goddess of Victory? Alas! Janaka, my father, who absolutely 235 surrendered to the Lord of the worlds himself, myself and his line when Rama snapped the bow of Siva, it is not given to him to behold the divine beauty of the Lord during his incarnation."

CHAPTER XXXI.

RAVANA HEARS THE NEWS.

AKAMPANA the rakshasa, the sole survivor of the battle, fled hotfoot to Lanka, bowed himself before Ravana and said "Lord! Khara, 5 Dooshana, Trisiras and all the redoubtable armies at Janasthana have been destroyed in battle. I alone live to bring the news, thanks to my ingenuity that

made me take a woman form to escape the arrows of
 10 Rama." His piteous cries reddened all the more the
 eyes of Ravana that were like lurid baleful fires; his
 cruel glances resembled the great Fire of dissolution at
 the end of the world. "Who is it has become tired of
 his life and has destroyed my beautiful Janasthana?
 15 Who casts himself in the fire of my wrath, unable to
 find refuge with all creation? Indra, Kubera, Yama or
 Vishnu, dare they displease me and hope to live in
 peace and quiet? I am the Death of Death; I am the
 Fire that consumes Fire; I am Time that destroys
 20 Time. Roused to fury, I reduce to ashes the sun
 and the fire-god massed together; I render the Lord of
 air utterly powerless. There is none who has any idea,
 though faint, of my might."

Akampana (the unshaken) shook with abject fear
 25 at the sight of the infuriated Ravana and blurted over
 his folded palms "Lord! I speak the truth if I am
 promised safety and protection." His prayer being
 granted, he took heart and said "Maharaja! Dasaratha
 has a son Rama by name, of unparalleled beauty and
 30 grace. In the prime of youth, with mighty shoulders
 like a mad bull, with long and powerful arms, a hero to
 the tips of his fingers, he is ever crowned with fame,
 power, wealth and valour; and it is he and no other
 that has despatched to the halls of Death, Khara,
 35 Dooshana and the other rakshasas at Janasthana."

Thereat Ravana hissed forth like a terrible serpent
 and cried "Akampana! was it not Indra and the devas
 who backed Rama at Janasthana?" Then Akampana
 began to expatiate upon the might and excellences of
 40 Rama. "Lord! Rama shines in ineffable splendour of
 spirit; the first and foremost of bowmen, all *astras*,
 human, divine and infernal, obey his behests; Indra and

his hosts are as nothing before him in battle. He has a brother who is his match in strength and valour; with large lustrous eyes slightly tinged with red at the corners, with a mighty voice like war-drums rolling, he outshines the moon in her full. They are a well-matched pair even like Fire and Storm. It is Rama has destroyed Janasthana; and no other assisted him in the work. Nay, think not that the devas were with him; the gold-banded arrows that sprang into existence from his bow like huge serpents, swallowed the lives of the rakshasas in sport. In mortal fear, these sought to hide themselves under other forms, but Rama fronted them in every one of them. They hid themselves anywhere, in any object, but Rama was there before them. They sought to escape by many as secret and unknown path, but Rama barred their way. Now, I have finished my account of the destruction of Janasthana." Then Ravana sprang up exclaiming "This moment I go forth to make short work of Rama and Lakshmana."

. "Nay, dread lord!" replied Akampana, gently "I pray you lend an ear to my appeal. Hear me while I describe, as best as I can, the strength, valour and wonderful deeds of Rama. Brahma, Indra and all others dare not face him in his wrath. His fame as a hero resounds through the infinite worlds. His shafts can stem the tide of a torrent in flood. He can scatter to the winds the nine sacred Planets, the twenty-seven constellations and the other luminaries. He can up-raise the globe as it sinks under the waters of the ocean. He can shatter the bounds of the oceans and engulf the worlds in the Great Waters. His arrows can still into quiet the roaring billows. He can cause the five Elements to be absorbed into one another and bring about Universal dissolution. That Supreme Person of

infinite power, the lord of manifold perfections (they call him Rama in his mortal guise) evolves and involves the countless worlds in the past *kalpas*, all through a
 80 slight exertion of his will.

“ I know that pride unutterable fills your heart to think that you and no other are crowned with ten heads. But Rama has myriads of hands, heads, eyes and feet ; he pervades the universe within and without.
 85 A nice comparison it is between the mount Meru and a gnat ! Dare you dream of opposing your puny self to his infinite might ? Have you not heard how Namuchi, Hiranyakasipu, Bali, Sambara, Hiranyaksha, Mali, Sumali, Malyavan and others fled before his
 90 wrath in utter dismay ? Perhaps you think that all these joined together might overpower him ? But just tell me whether all the sinners in the world banded together should storm the heights of *swarga*. Have you heard that millions of blind men massed together,
 95 saw, as well as, or better than, one man with clear sight ? Perhaps you think that you have at your back Indra and his devas who have been worsted by your son Indrajit. Well, the entire deva and asura creation arrayed together cannot hope in the slightest to
 100 approach him.

“ But let me find you a way out of the difficulty ; listen with your heart, with your soul. He has a wife Seeta so named. In the flower of youth, graced by beautiful ornaments but more lovely in her natural
 105 beauty, loveliness, grace and faultless symmetry of form and feature, she is the very gem of a woman. Devas, gandharvas, danavas and apsarasas cannot produce her equal ; why speak of mortals ? If you somehow manage to entice Rama away from her into the track-
 110 less forests and abduct her meanwhile, Raghuveera,

whose heart and soul is centred in her, will, I am sure, give up his life the next moment."

Ravana approved of the plan and long did he think over upon how to lure Rama away from Seeta. At last, he exclaimed "Akampana! to-morrow at day-break 115 I leave here for Janasthana, all by myself and I do not return without Janaki."

Accordingly he mounted a chariot drawn by mules that shone like the sun; and like the moon cutting her way through cloud banks, he coursed through the sky 120 with the speed of thought to where Mareecha, the son of Tataka, sat in his asrama. The latter welcomed him with every mark of respect and affection, offered him a seat and enquired of his welfare. "Lord of the rakshasas! is it well with the subjects who call you 125 king? You have not come here in hot haste and all alone unless some mighty purpose impels you. I guess that your heart is not in peace; but, I cannot read the details of it." To which Ravana replied tersely, "Mareecha! one Rama has destroyed in battle Khara and 130 his forces who were stationed at Janasthana as wardens of the marches. So, find me a way to abduct his wife."

Mareecha lifted his hands in affright and cried "Alas! what hypocritical friend and worst enemy of yours has incited you to make away with Seeta? Who, 135 disgraced and insulted at some time or other and now all envious of your power and wealth, has poured this baneful counsel in your ears? Who has set himself to break the grand tusks of that mighty elephant, the rakshasa race? Do you still doubt that it is your 140 relentless foe has advised you to abduct Seeta? Who has put it into your heart to thrust your hand down the mouth of a deadly serpent and extract its poison fangs? Who is it seeks to destroy you, root and

145 branch, by hurling you into this abyss of wickedness?
 Who seeks to inflict wanton misery upon you and strike
 you on the head as you lie in calm and peaceful slumber?
 Rama is like the *gandha-hasti* (a species of elephant)
 whom other elephants avoid by the very odour that
 150 emanates from his body; his birth in the noble line of
 the Ikshwakus is its trunk: his spiritual radiance is
 its ichor of rut; his beautiful arms are its tusks; and
 dare you raise your eyes to him in battle? Rama is a
 lion among men; the impregnable position he takes up
 155 on the field of battle, like the moment Meru, is his
 heavy tail; your warriors are the deer that fall a
 prey to it; his arrows are its limbs; his sharp sword is
 its fangs; now, let sleeping lions lie. Perhaps one may
 escape with life and limb from an encounter with a
 160 lion, if the Fates be favourable, or if the moment be
 auspicious; but even that hope is out of the question if
 you attack Rama. Again, Rama is the great Deep; his
 bow is the fearful crocodile that roams therein; his
 quickness of hand in shooting is the deep mire therein
 165 that engulfs hopelessly everything it touches; his
 shafts are the never-ceasing billows that swallow every
 object in creation; fierce battle is the waters of the
 ocean; and there lives none to tell the of his having
 crossed it. Now, would you advise any one to fall
 170 therein? Lord of Lanka! Crest-jewel of the rakshasa
 line! I entreat you with joined palms; put away wrath
 from you; go back to Lanka. Rest happy in the com-
 pany of your wives and let Rama live happily in the
 woods in the company of his wife." Thus did
 175 Mareecha, advise him out of the strong love he bore for
 Ravana; fortunately for him, the rakshasa king was
 convinced and took leave of his friend to return to his
 capital.

CHAPTER XXXII.

SOORPANAKHA SEEKS RAVANA.

RHARA, Dooshana, the captains of the hosts and the fourteen thousand rakshasas were wiped out of existence by Ravana in the twinkling of an eye ; 5 Soorpanakha saw it all and roared with fury. Anon, fear overcame her at that marvellous deed ; bursting with grief, she fled to the capital of Ravana and stood in the presence of her brother as he sat on his gem-encrusted throne in the *vimana* named Pushpaka that 10 shone like the sun. His ministers and counsellors stood behind him even as the Maruts surround Indra ; and he shone in the splendour of his might even as a flaming fire on a golden altar, fed with continuous offerings.

Unconquerable in battle by devas, gandharvas, 15 rishis or other created beings, he resembled the Great Destroyer as he speeds open-mouthed to swallow the entire creation. His body was one mass of scars from wounds inflicted by the *vajra*, the thunderbolt and other weapons of the devas and by the discus of 20 Vishnu. His breast bore marks of where the Elephants that support the world tore at with their tusks, that shone like sixteen moons, full-rayed. Ten heads had he, twice ten hands, a huge chest, long muscular arms, white teeth and a cavernous mouth. Endowed with 25 every mark of royalty, his earrings shone like the sun and the moon. Like a lofty mountain sat he, as his favourite attendants crowded about him with priceless umbrellas, *chamaras* and flags. He could shake to its very depths the unfathomable ocean ; with him to think 30 was to achieve ; he could play with huge mountains as balls ; he was the terror of the devas, the destroyer of

dharmas, the violent abductor of other women; and he concentrated in himself the force and energy of the divine
 35 and infernal *astras*. Ever busy with desecrating sacrificial rites, he repaired to Bhogavati the capital of the *nagas*, conquered Vasuki, the ruler thereof and carried away the favourite wife of Takshaka. He went to mount Kailasa to defeat Kubera and deprive him of Pushpaka,
 40 the *vimana* that obeyed the least thought of its owner. One day, he waxed wroth and laid in ruins Chaitraratha and Nandana, the marvellous pleasure-gardens of Kubera and Indra. He could stay with his hands the sun and the moon as they rose in the sky, for, huge as
 45 the peak of mount Meru was he. Once, he sat in stern tapas for ten thousand years and offered his ten heads in the fire to propitiate Brahma; in return whereof he got a boon that Death should not approach him through *devas*, *danavas*, *gandharvas*, *pisachas*, *patagas*
 50 and *uragas*—puny mortals he counted not. He delighted in destroying sacrifices when the brahmanas were about to close them with deep draughts of Soma, or when, at the finish, the priests received their fees. Cruel beyond words, wicked, the torturer of brahmanas,
 55 relentless of heart, an utter stranger to pity or friendship, he was a holy terror to all beings; he ever sought the ruin and misery of the worlds and struck dire dismay into the hearts of all creatures. He was the most brilliant representative of the line of Pulastya.
 60 Rich in everything the heart could desire, of inconceivable strength, he was the Death incarnate of his foes; he was the Time that destroys Time and looked death from his large eyes that blazed like flames.

Priceless garments, garlands and jewels adorned
 65 his person; he sat on his throne, dread and majestic, among his minister and followers. And him, the

famed lord of Lanka, did Soorpanakha approach (for he was her brother); for albeit she could course through the worlds fearless and unimpeded, she was confused with her fear of Rama; then she drew the attention of 70 Ravana to the insult and outrage to which she had been subjected and pierced his heart with cruel taunts.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SOORPANAKHA INCITES RAVANA.

HER soul was heavy with the disgrace that Rama and Lakshmana had laid upon her; she was filled with rage to see that Ravana minded her 5 not, though her plight was pitiable to see. "Ever sunk in the mire of lust and sensuality, you give unbridled license to your passions and thoughts; bound to see far into the future and provide against the dangers therein, you are ignorant of them even when 10 they are at your heels. Like the impure fire in the crematorium, men shun the king who, greedy and self-willed, loses his intellect and will in the slough of low pleasures. He who bestows not care and personal attention upon the affairs of state in the right time and 15 place, brings sure destruction upon himself, the kingdom and its concerns. Elephants avoid deep miry rivers; even so, subjects avoid the presence of the king who utilises not aright his messengers, envoys, ambassadors and spies, who gives not due audience to his people on 20 stated occasions and who is a tool in the hands of others. Like mountains engulfed in the depths of the ocean, prosperity and fame are strangers to him who, ever dependent upon others, seeks not the welfare of the kingdom entrusted to his care.

“*Devas, gandharvas and danavas* are your relentless
 foes ; full well do you know they are ever on the watch
 to drag you down ; yet, you utilise not aright your
 envoys and spies ; you fritter away your intellect and
 30 strength in brutish pleasures ; are you not ashamed to
 call yourself a king ? You are as ignorant as a babe ;
 nay, you are infinitely lower in the scale ; you acquaint
 yourself not with things absolutely necessary for your
 safety and good ; are you not ashamed to call yourself
 35 a king ? Where lies the difference between ordinary
 men and a king who dare not call his wealth, policy,
 power and messengers his own ? Kings are said to be
 endowed with clear sight since they see and hear
 through their spies every thing that takes place in
 40 their country or of others ; now, you know not how to
 use your men. Your ministers and advisers are but an
 ignorant rabble. Lo ! your kin and subjects have been
 annihilated in Janasthana, on your frontiers ; yet you
 know it not. Rama, an insignificant mortal, has made
 45 short work of fourteen thousand cruel rakshasas led by
 Trisiras, Dooshana and Khara, your brother ; can
 nothing rouse a spark of shame in you ?

“ Let that be. Rama has promised refuge and pro-
 tection to the rishis of Dandaka ; Janasthana is in ruins ;
 50 Dandaka is now the fearless and favourite resort of
 your late victims ; you hear this and yet are dead to
 every sense of shame ? You are a miser that rewards
 not your men as they deserve ; overflowing with blind
 self-conceit, you are yet a slave to others. It needs
 55 no ghost to tell it when I see that you are all ignorant
 of the great danger that is even now upon you. Do
 you dream that your subjects will flock to your standard
 in times of danger and you, so hopelessly cruel, arrogant,
 their secret enemy who robs them of the honour and

reward that is their due ? His very men take advantage of his danger to kill him if the ruler is haughty, boastful, liable to sudden bursts of wrath and utterly unamenable to good advice. He is hunted from his kingdom and is more insignificant than a blade of grass, if he does not things at the right season, if he has not a wholesome fear of what should be avoided. Withered wood, stones and dust are useful at times ; but, a fugitive king has not even that merit. Like a soiled garment or a faded garland, he is utterly useless, be he ever so clever. 60 65 70

“ Long and happily does he reign, the king who is prudent, far-seeing, self-controlled, grateful and loyal to dharma. The coveted object of a nation’s reverence is he who, sleeping or awake, has his eyes of state-craft ever open ; his favour and displeasure are ever fruitful. Ravana ! you are evil-hearted and possess none of these excellences. What more glaring proof than your dreadful ignorance of the misery of your subjects ? It comes natural to you to insult others, to slight your foes, to be steeped in low pleasures, never to speak or act in time and place and to be cursed with an intellect that has not been trained to discriminate merits and defects. Hence, you are not far from disgrace, defeat, exile and death.” 75 80

Ravana, who stood higher than all others in power, pride and strength, heard her out as she painted his defects in lurid colours ; and long and earnestly did he take counsel with himself—for there was Mareecha who was dead against his fighting with Rama ; and here was his sister who hotly incited him to it. 85 90

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE FATAL ADVICE.

THESE cruel sarcasms and taunts before his ministers enraged Ravana against Rama and he cried "Who is he, that Rama? Give me some idea of his form, feature, valour and prowess. What brought him to Dandaka that is shunned by the ordinary run of men? What weapons did he use to slay Khara, Dooshna and Trisiras?"

- 10 Soorpanakha was maddened to see him so stupidly ignorant. Hopelessly infatuated with Lakshmana, she described in brief the beauty and grace of Rama that stole away the hearts of all. "Rama has arms that reach down to the knees. Of large starlike eyes, he is
- 15 garbed in deerskin and dress of bark. His loveliness puts to shame the God of love; yet, compassion unbounded wells up from his eyes. He has come to these forests in hermit-guise, but to ward off evil from his devotees and confer eternal life and bliss upon them.
- 20 He grasps his mighty gold-banded bow and shoots from it arrows terrible as deadly serpents. No one can perceive when he draws his shafts from the quiver or sets them on the string or draws them to the ear or shoots them at the enemy. As Indra destroys with
- 25 his hail the proud ears of corn, his arrows are felt only when we see the foes reel and topple by hundreds and thousands. Alone and on foot, he despatched, in the twinkling of an eye, fourteen thousand terrible rakshasas to the realms of Death; Khara and Dooshana put
- 30 up no show before him; rishis find a safe refuge in him; Dandaka is now the prosperous and fearless

resort of all. Alone I escaped with life, thanks to my womanhood that he respects and reverences.

“He has a brother, Lakshmana so named. Of blinding lustre, the prince of heroes, unapproachable by foes, 35
wrathful, strong, intelligent, he is Rama’s *alter ego*
in excellence and valour; boundless is his love and
devotion to Raghuveera who holds him as his active,
visible, life-breaths; like his right hand, he renders
every service to Rama. 40

He has a wife whom they call Seeta. Her eyes
are large and broad; and her face is beautiful as the
moon in her full. She follows in her husband’s foot-
steps in the practice of dharma. Their love to one
another is beyond description. Her dark and lustrous 45
hair and her nose like a *champaka* bud do but serve to
heighten her witching loveliness. Her fame illuminates
the ends of the world. She seems more like a Goddess
of the woods or Mahalakshmi. Her complexion is like
that of molten gold. Her fingers nails are red and 50
somewhat raised; her wasplike waist is a marvel of
symmetry. Never have I set my eyes upon her like
in the worlds of *devas*, *gandharvas*, *yakshas*, *kinnaras*,
men or *asuras*. Fortunate above others, blessed beyond
words, is he who calls Seeta his wife. It matters not 55
if she would not clasp him in fond embrace; it is
enough if she is with him as a wife, to secure him
heavenly bliss. Nay, it matters not that she is not his
wife; it is enough if she clasps him to her breast in
fond love to secure for him joys that Indra dreams not 60
of. A model of propriety is she and unmatched in
form and feature; she is a meet wife for you and you
are a meet husband for her. I but strove to carry her
away, that marvel of beauty, to make you a wife and
the cruel Lakshmana punished me thus for it. You 65

have but to cast your eyes on that gem of a woman, on her face that shames the Queen of night in her full-orbed radiance and you fall hopelessly transfixed with the darts of Love. Do you aspire to call her
 70 your wife? Then, start right away and, as a sign of success, put your right foot foremost. At least avenge the miserable deaths of the rakshasas that have been slain by Rama. Let your keen shafts pierce the hearts of Rama and Lakshmana and you may do what
 75 you like with the helpless Seeta. Act upon my advice if you deem it sound; doubt not; realise in full your might and power; and bring back Seeta with you, that the wonder of the worlds might become your wife. Impress upon your mind the pitiable deaths of Khara,
 80 Dooshana and the rakshasas at Janasthanu by the sharp shafts of Rama and do as seems to you best."

CHAPTER XXXV.

RAVANA AGAIN SEEKS MAREECHA.

AT the fearful words of his sister, Ravana sent his
 5 ministers away without taking counsel of them and retired to his apartments. There he thought it carefully over, decided upon a course of action and again balanced its advantages and disadvantages, its strength and weakness. "Shall I make an open attack on Rama and Lakshmana and carry away Seeta
 10 by force? Or, shall I abduct her in secret? Judging from the fate that has befallen Khara and Dooshana, it is well nigh impossible to attack Rama; so, it follows that the better course is to steal her away. Reft of Seeta and whelmed under the waves of grief, Rama is
 15 no more dangerous to us." He strengthened his resolve,

prepared the details and gave secret instructions to his driver to bring round his car, which was done. Fashioned of gold, inlaid with gems, it was drawn by mules with the hideous faces of pisachas; Ravana mounted it and crossed the sea by the aerial route; 20 with the white umbrella, chamaras, flags and other ensigns of royalty, he sat there with his ten heads and twenty arms like a mountain of emerald crowned with ten lofty peaks or like a black rain-cloud hanging low in the sky, while lightnings play through it and 25 flocks of cranes girdle it. The lord of Lanka, the mortal foe of gods and men, passed through many a land and beheld many a sight—the countries that bordered upon the sea, mountainous and green with diverse flowers and fruits; lotus-ponds full of holy waters; 30 spacious asramas dotted with altars; noble trees like the plantain, the jack, the cocoanut, the palm and the *sal*, hid beneath their tribute of blown flowers and ripe fruits; woods where dwelt nagas, gandharvas, kinnaras and suparnas: maharshis of regulated diet like the 35 *vaikhanasas*, the deathless *valakhlyas*, the *mashas* and the *mareechipas*: *siddhas* that held under stern control the senses and mind: *charanas*: *apsarasas* gaily adorned with gems and garlands that heightened their divine loveliness as they disported themselves: *deva* ladies 40 blessed with every comfort and luxury; as also *devas* and *danavas*. Swans, herons, storks and other water fowl sent forth sweet and melodious cries; hills and mountains bright with emeralds met his eye while *gandharvas* and *apsarasas*, whose *tapas* won for them 45 the worlds on high, coursed through the heavens in white spacious *vimanas* gaily adorned, from which was wafted to the ear the sounds of music and song. His careless eye rested on the *moolake* (a plant of occult

50 properties from which flow the sap that makes asafoe-
 tida), fragrant groves of sandal, aloes, nutmegs, *tamalus*,
 and pepper trees: groups of pearl-oysters, conches
 and coral drifted ashore by the waves: rich mines of
 gold, silver and other metals: roaring torrents, deep
 55 pools and cities rich in corn and wealth, in lovely women
 and in magnificent armies. The seashore resembled the
 homes of the devas, so level and charming it was with
 the gentle zephyr sighing over it.

Next, he came upon a huge banyan that, like a
 60 cloud-bank, spread its boughs in all directions to the
 length of many yojonas. Countless maharshis sat in
 tapas under it. Then, Garuda flew there with a huge
 elephant and tortoise in his talons and perched upon
 the tree to have his dinner. The bough gave way under
 65 the tremendous weight. Sore afraid that the maharshis
 below would be crushed to death, Garuda snatched
 the bough and flew with it to a great distance, where he
 ate the creatures. The branch he dropped upon a *pariah*
 village, destroying the wicked inmates that held in
 70 terror the hermits thereabouts. Endowed with double
 strength and energy from the huge dinner he had, he
 flew to the regions of the gods and set about to carry
 away the amrita that was preserved there. He shat-
 tered to pieces the iron nets and the other curious engines,
 75 demolished the fortress of adamant and bore away the
 Waters it guarded so carefully. Ravana beheld
 the maharshis as they sat in meditation under the
 banyan *Subhadra* and the bough breaking under the
 weight of Garuda.

80 Far did he journey until he reached the other
 shore and alighted in the sacred grove where Mareecha
 spent his days in stern tapas with regulated diet,
 garbed like a hermit. Right royal was the welcome

and hospitality accorded to his kinsman and lord by the son of Tataka. Later, when Ravana was seated comfortably, Mareecha asked in humble accents, "Maharaja! is it well with your kin and the people at Lanka? May I know the reason of your return here so fast and all alone?"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MAREECHA DISSUADES RAVANA.

TO which replied the lord of Lanka "Mareecha! a great load of anxiety crushes me and none other but you can relieve me of it. You need not be told that Khara my brother, Dooshana, Trisiras, Soorpanakha my sister and other numerous rakshasas abode in Janasthana by my orders. Happy was their life and delightful as they destroyed the tapas and dharma of the rishis that dwelt in the Dandaka forests. Fourteen thousand irrepressible rakshasa warriors sallied forth in battle against Rama, who, in silent wrath, made short work of them with his deadly shafts. A man and on foot, he despatched Khara, Dooshana and Trisiras to the dark realms of Death!! The forests of Dandaka are now the fearless resort of all! Rama fled hither before the just wrath of his father. How long can he hope to live in these dread haunts? He is a canker that would destroy the noble race of kshatriyas; base, stupid, cruel, greedy, pitiless, of unbridled passions, a renegade to dharma, he ever seeks the ruin of all beings. All unprovoked, all wantonly, blinded with his puny strength, he mutilated my sister Soorpanakha; and I mean to avenge her by carrying away from Janasthana his wife Seeta, lovelier by far

than the maids of heaven. I hold it as nothing if the deva hosts come upon me in a flood, so long as you and my brothers stand by me. So, help me with your brain and arm. I have yet to see your equal in strength,
 30 valour or martial skill. A born hero, you are master of every device, of every illusion. That is why I have sought you.

“Transform yourself into a golden deer with white spots and wander about their asrama, in sight of
 35 Seeta. All innocently she will take you for a real deer and importune the princes to catch you. Entice them far, far away from the cottage; and it is easy work for me to abduct Seeta, even as Rahu enfolds the moon.

“Seeta lost to him, Rama loses heart and falls an
 40 easy prey to me. Then I achieve my object to the utmost.”

At the first mention of the name of Rama, Mareecha's face shrunk with terror; his limbs shook as with palsy; his mouth was parched. He licked his lips
 45 and gazed at Ravana with unwinking eyes as one dead. His heart turned to water with fear and grief, for, he had felt the weight of Rama's arm in Dandaka but too heavily. So, with joined palms and humble accents, did he seek to advice what would be best for himself and for
 50 Ravana and unveiled the mystery of Rama somewhat.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MAREECHA'S ADVICE.

“**M**AHARAJA! many are there around the king
 5 who heed not the welfare or otherwise of their master in times of danger, but basely flatter him, ever intent upon their own interests. But rare, nay, impossible to find one who, ever intent upon

his master's welfare, advises him to his best, time and oft, placing stern duty before his own safety and his master's wrath, though his well-meant advice appear harsh and 10 evil at the time, sure in the belief that it would result in happiness and glory in the long run. But, rarer by far, more impossible it is to find the master who, unblinded by desire or hate, casts away prejudice or prepossession from himself and patiently lends an ear to the 15 unpleasant counsel. I take it that your messengers and spies keep you a stranger to everything that concerns Rama. You know not that he is the best and foremost of heroes; that he is higher than the Regents of the worlds; that he is dowered with every noble 20 perfection; or you have not paid any attention to it, preoccupied with diverse cares of state. My son! it is even now I sent you from here with many a wholesome advice and you have come back in hot haste. I see that all my care, all my solicitude is thrown away upon 25 you and that other wicked designing men hold you in their power. Alas! the Powers grant that the entire rakshasa race rest in happiness and safety. I know not if Rama, in his wrath, will wipe them off the face of the earth. Or, is Seeta your Fate incarnate? And 30 am I doomed to meet *my* death through her? Lanka and the race of rakshasas, are they doomed to be destroyed, simply for the fault of having elected you as their king, who, in blind conceit, rejects the well-meant counsel of the good? A king of your stamp, wicked, 35 unbridled and surrounded by designing evil-hearted ministers, very soon compasses the destruction of himself, his people and his kingdom.

“ You utter a lie when you say that Rama fled to the forests before the wrath of his father and is disloyal 40 to dharma. Nor is he greedy, cruel, of wicked life or

ever plotting the ruin of all beings. On the other hand, he is Kausalya's supreme merit incarnate and is crowned with all noble perfections. He saw his truthful
 45 father deceived by Kaikeyi and, an adept in the mysteries of every dharma, he elected to exile himself to the forests to make his father's promise good. He has voluntarily renounced the kingdom and its joys that were his by right and has come to Dandaka but to
 50 gratify the wishes of Kaikeyi and Dasaratha.

“ Rama is not relentless of heart nor stupid nor of unbridled senses ; you do ill to repeat the lies circulated by your crafty advisers. Rama is the God of dharma incarnate ; and it is inconceivable that there should be
 55 any stain or flaw in him. The very soul of everything good and righteous, yet, his valour is never put forth in vain. He is the Lord of the myriad worlds even as Indra is the ruler of the devas. His wife Seeta, the daughter of Janaka the wise, is best protected by her faithfulness
 60 and chastity. As well separate the splendour and radiance from the sun as part her from Rama ; as impossible to carry her away as to deprive the sun of his lustre. The foolish one who strives to steal away the heat and radiance of the sun is consumed thereby ;
 65 even so, he who seeks to carry away Seeta meets his death through her. Rama is unapproachable as the Fire of Dissolution ; his terrible bow is the fuel that feeds it ; his arrows are the flames ; I entreat you not to throw yourself in it. Again, Rama is like the God of death ;
 70 his bow is the open mouth of Yama ; the arrows his foes flee from are his blinding radiance ; his bow is the noose of Death that is flung round the necks of his foes. Do not seek to attack him ; for, you but seek the ruin of your kingdom, happiness, life and everything it
 75 contains. Prithee do not so. .

“Unparalleled is the splendour of him who calls the daughter of Janaka his wife. All the more carefully would the princes guard her during their sojourn in the forests. Dare you hope to abduct her, the daughter of Janaka the wise, whom Rama's bow has vowed to 80 protect? He is a lion among men and of broad and mighty shoulders like a lion. His wife is no way behind him in the perfect observance of his dharma. Dearer to him than life is she. Would any one but a hopeless idiot dream of stealing her away, who is more deadly 85 than a flaming fire? Who would dare outrage the wife of Rama, the prince of heroes? Why go upon this mad and foolish quest? You have but to behold him on the field of battle to give up your life. It is no light thing to enjoy life, happiness and a kingdom; do not 90 incite him to anger if you desire to possess these advantages long. Take deep counsel with righteous ministers like Vibheeshana; weigh well your strength and weakness, as also that of Rama; have a clear and perfect idea of the good and evil that awaits you; and 95 then, act as seems to you best. It is plain to me and gospel truth that defeat and death are your portion if you seek a fight with Rama. My words are ever straight, reasonable and beneficial; heed them well.”

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MAREECHA'S ADVICE.—(*continued*).

“**R**AVANA! I do not draw upon my imagination when I advise you thus; nor, do I seek to 5 excuse myself from assisting you through unwillingness or fear of Rama. Now, hear me relate a personal experience. Once upon a time I roamed

through the forests of Dandaka, proud of my immense strength of ten thousand elephants and of my bright
10 fame as a hero; huge of form like a mountain, black and terrible to behold as a dark rain-cloud, I was gaily decked with a crown and ear-rings and delighted myself with frightening all creatures, slaughtering the rishis and feeding upon their flesh. Then, Maharshi
15 Visvamitra was conducting a yaga: I spoiled it and caused him much anxiety and apprehension. He sought the presence of Dasaratha and said 'King! Mareecha the rakshasa, desecrates my yaga and torments the rishis with me; so, lend me the help of your heroic boy
20 Rama.' Dasaratha replied 'Maharshi! Raghava is but a boy; twelve summers have not passed over his head; he has not completed his course of instruction in the science of astras and cannot gauge well the strength and weakness of the foe. I go with you at the head of
25 my famous warriors to destroy those wicked wretches.' 'Nay, said Visvamitra 'you have crowned yourself with undying fame as the vanquisher of the asuras, when you fought for Indra. The worlds resound with your praise. Keep your mighty warriors with you;
30 no one but Rama can quell that *rakshasa*. Boy though he be, your son is more than enough for my purpose. So, I take him with me and may all good go with you.' And he came down to his asrama in high joy followed by Rama. The yaga was resumed and the boy kept
35 guard over it, bow in hand. A very boy, with not even the suspicion of down upon his lips, he was clad in a single garment as became a brahmacharin (celibate). He wore his hair after the fashion of the kshatriyas; and his splendour and the sheen of his ornaments illu-
40 minated the dark Dandaka like the rising moon in her full. Then, I sped there in my huge bulk, black like a

thunder-cloud through which gleamed my golden ear-rings like lambent lightnings ; inordinately proud of my strength and the boons I had won, I rushed along like a whirlwind and sprang upon him all carelessly, 45 swinging aloft my terrible pike bound with iron. But, Rama evinced not the least fear or confusion ; he grasped his bow leisurely and twanged it so that the worlds shook in wild affright. My brain was in a mad whirl thereby, but I despised him as a slip of a boy and 50 harmless ; so, I sprang upon the altar where Visvamitra was, making his offerings. All at once Raghava shot a keen shaft from his bow. It bore me before it like a feather for a hundred yojanas and plunged me into the depths of the sea. It was in his power to take my life, 55 but he spared it for some unknown purpose of his. His arrows deprived me of my senses, so rapidly was I rushed. Long did I toss among the waves until I came back to consciousness and crept to Lanka. A mere boy, not yet through the course of instruction 60 in the Science of the astras, ever innocent of any harm to others, yet, he reduced me to that miserable plight with a single arrow of his. My followers were taken care of but too well by his unerring shafts.

“ Hence, I entreat you not to seek a fight with him. 65 I would stand between you and his wrath. If you are still obstinate, I but take it as a sign of your approaching Fate. Your subjects are leading happy lives and are busy with sports, pastimes and women. Why draw down misery and destruction upon their innocent 70 heads ? Your eyes will rest upon the ruins of Lanka with its mansions, palaces, forts, gardens, pleasure-houses, artificial hills and lakes, lotus-ponds and all its wealth of gold and gems—thanks to the wrath of Seeta. Your wickedness engulfs the innocent rakshasas that 75

adhere to you. Righteous men of blameless life have but to associate with sinful wretches to be destroyed by their unholy deeds, even as the innocent fish in a deep pool are killed along with the deadly snakes
80 therein. Your eyes will rest upon the corpses of your people as they carpet the ground—now gaily decked, every one of them, with perfumes and jewels—and all through your wickedness. The survivors will flee house and home, wife and child and seek to hide their helpless
85 heads anywhere. Verily, you are fated to behold Lanka as it topples down before the arrows of your foe, the blackened walls and grey ashes staring you in the face of what were once houses, palaces and fanes of the gods. What sin more heinous than to violate the
90 wives of others? Have you not in your harem thousands of lovely and charming women? Rest happy in their company and content; seek not to tear up the rakshasa race by the roots. Do you desire to live long and happily in the company of wives and children,
95 kinsmen and friends, power and wealth, rank and dignity, and what is dearer than all these—sweet life? Then, seek not the enmity of Rama. Your kinsman am I; you have no truer friend; your welfare is ever my care. I seek to dissuade you by many a reason,
100 by many an argument. If you are yet obstinate and would outrage Seeta, I assure you that the arrows of Rama will make short work of yourself, your kinsmen, your friends and your armies.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

MAREECHA'S ADVICE (*Continued*).

“R”AVANA ! I spoke to you till now on the wonderful deeds of Rama, his strength and prowess while he was but a boy. Now 5 follows an incident that took place when he was in the prime of youth and strength and had mastered the science of war. Listen to me and interrupt not. Once before, I was in danger of losing my life through his arrow and escaped, thanks to 10 his boundless compassion ; yet, fear touched not my heart nor was I brought to reason. One day, myself and two others turned ourselves into deer and entered that part of Dandaka where he abode. With bodies of mountainous bulk, sharp teeth and flaming 15 tongues, we wandered fearlessly through sacrificial halls, sacred spots and trees where dwell mighty spirits, frightened and outraged holy hermits, saints and rishis, tortured them to death and feasted upon their flesh, scattering terror and ruin among the beings 20 that dwelt thereabouts. Maddened with huge draughts of blood, we desecrated the holy rites and at last reached the asrama where abode the hermit princes with Janaki. I cast a contemptuous glance at Rama, the friend of all creation, as he sat there in his matted coils 25 and dress of bark, sustaining himself upon a meagre diet and said to myself ‘ Now, he has adopted a hermit life and would not harm any one.’ I despised the hero and rejoiced to see that the moment had come for me to take revenge upon him for what I suffered at his hands 30 in the past ; and I sprang upon him suddenly, resolved to gore him with my sharp horns. Thrice-distilled fool

that I was to forget the punishment he laid upon me once before ! Should I not have warned myself that
 35 'though in hermit-guise, he is armed to the teeth. I must not approach him, for there is no saying that he would not slay me ?' He bent his bow and shot at me three arrows roaring like Garuda or the God of fire. With crooked joints, they were mad with thirst to drink
 40 the blood of foemen and sped towards me in a line like vajras. Then flashed upon my stupid brain the matchless valour of Rama ; I had bitter experience and fearful of the agony they could inflict ; utterly confused in mind, I vanished from view and escaped with life ; for, they
 45 harm him not who flees like a coward before them. The other two rakshasas were slain through their ignorance of his terrible power.

"Thus, thanks to my good fortune, I was saved from death ; and since then, I have devoted myself to a
 50 life of tapas in this wood with mind and senses under strict control. I live upon a meagre diet, shun the path of evil and follow the footsteps of the good and the pure. I see him at the foot of every tree in his dress of bark, and matted coils, grasping his terrible bow, like Yama
 55 with the noose of Time in his hands. Not one but, to my frightened eyes, thousands and ten thousands of Ramas meet me at every turn. The object of our concentrated thought visualises itself before us, be it grief or desire or fear that impels us. Perhaps you
 60 explain it that 'Rama goes and stands at the foot of every tree to confuse your senses thus.' Let be the trees ; this vast forest is filled with Rama wherever I turn my eyes. Say not that it is a glamour cast by him upon me. For I see him even where he is not.
 65 Not alone during my waking hours, but I see him in my dreams and rave incoherently through fear. Of late,

the very mention of him is enough to grip my heart with terror. Nay, I tremble when some one utters a word beginning with the syllable *Ra*—say *ratna* (gem) or *ratha* (car)—for, I dread to think of some vague 70 danger that might befall me should he utter the name of Rama. My heart resumes by slow degrees its sense of peace and safety only when the succeeding syllable is something other than *ma*.

“Ravana ! too well do I know his might and yours. 75 Take my advice—you *cannot* cope with him. It is sport for him to destroy Bali and Namuchi. Should you desire to avenge Khara and Dooshana, seek him in fight or put up with the insult ; but never set your heart upon carrying away Seeta by stealth. In a word, 80 drop all mention of him, all thought, if you desire to see me alive again. Many are the good and holy men of righteous and pure lives, of well controlled senses, that go down to destruction with their followers. all through the misdeeds of the sinful wretches they associate with. 85 I have put away harm and evil behind me and seek to lead a good and pure life ; but, should I share your company for a while, I am doomed to destruction through your misdeeds. So, do as seems to you best, but compel me not. I *will not* go with you ; for, I but 90 go to meet my Fate. Inconceivable is the strength, valour and splendour of Rama ; take heed you do not invite him to be the Doom of the rakshasa race. Yet, when I think of your mulish obstinacy and perversity, I have no doubt it would turn out so. 95

“Let be. Why should you seek to work evil to to Rama ? Is it for the death of Khara and Dooshana ? Why do you blame him for slaying them in pure self-defence when they wantonly sought his life ? Or, is it for the mutilation of your sister ? Verily, he acted 100

as a fool when he allowed her to escape with life *minus* a nose and ears, seeing that she sprang upon Seeta to crunch her bones. Her good fortune and Rama's misplaced compassion stood between her and
 105 death. Now, tell me wherein Rama is to blame. I force my sincere advice upon your unwilling ears again and again, as you are my kinsman, my friend and my king. Yet should you slight it, should you, in your mad obstinacy, seek to carry out your nefarious purpose,
 115 pose, verily I say unto you that Death walks 'loose among the rakshasas in the guise of Rama's pitiless arrows."

CHAPTER XL.

RAVANA COERCES MAREECHA.

SAFE, beneficial, practicable and reasonable was the advice of Mareecha; but, as one shadowed
 5 by approaching Death flings aside the medicine that would save him, Ravana heeded it not and, hounded on by Fate, spoke back harshly and unjustly. "Mareecha! your advice is utterly useless. You care not to speak in consonance with the wishes of your king; and, like
 10 seed sown on arid ground, it goes to waste. A mere mortal, foolish and sinful, it is derogatory to my fame and greatness to fight with Rama; he is best punished in being deprived of his wife. You ignore that and move heaven and earth to force me into a duel with him.
 15 What a figure I would cut if I offer him fight, who, at a word of the weak miserable woman Kaikēyi, fled in cowardly haste from parents, kinsmen, friends and kingdom! Right before your eyes will I make away with Seeta dearer to him than life—the wicked wretch

that slew Khara and Dooshana in battle. That would 20
be a more terrible punishment to him than taking
away his life. Now, my heart is set upon it and devas
and asuras cannot turn me aside.

“It is extremely presumptuous of you to offer me
advice unasked. Your place is but to submit an 25
humble reply, should I ask you about the gain and loss,
the good and the evil, the advantages or otherwise of
any course of action. I came not here to sit at your
feet; so, your words are entirely out of place. You
know, not the very elements of how to acquaint a king 30
with news or advice. Servants should, if they desire their
welfare and prosperity, humbly submit over joined
palms any advice or proposal only after being ordered to
do so. Nay, even well-meant beneficial counsels should
always be offered gently, politely and respectfully. They 35
should be pleasant, auspicious and consonant to the
wishes of the master. Do you expect the lords of the
earth to notice any proposal, supremely beneficial
though it be, if offered slightly and without respect?
The king is sharp as Agni, valiant as Indra, pleasant 40
as Chandra, powerful to punish as Varuna and
merciful as Dharma; so, he is the five Powers incar-
nate and concentrates in him their boundless splendour.
At all times and places, kings deserve respect and
reverence in thought, word and deed. 45

“You are all ignorant of the very elements of king-
craft; your intellect is hopelessly clouded. Here, I seek
you out and request your help; and you cross me,
rebuke me and shame me in my own eyes with harsh
words and unjust—and I, your king, your kinsman and 50
your friend! Did I come to you to take counsel upon the
advantages or otherwise of my intended plan or my
welfare or my capacity? Once for all I tell you—you

must help me in this affair. It is useless for you to
 55 urge that it is beyond your power, for, I know it is
 boundless. Here is what I expect of you. Take the
 form of a deer, with a skin of gold, sprinkled with curious
 white spots. Wander about the asrama of Rama, ever
 keeping within the view of Seeta. Deceive her and
 60 lure away Rama and Lakshmana far from their abode ;
 my purpose achieved, go where you list. Seeta is sure
 to importune Rama to catch for her the golden deer of
 curious beauty. Draw him after you far away and send
 forth a cry ‘ Ah, Seeta ! Ah, Lakshmana ! ’ in Rama’s
 65 tones. Seeta will not lose a moment in sending Laksh-
 mana to help his brother, which he would do, of a truth,
 thanks to his absurd love for him. Rama and Laksh-
 mana absent from the asrama, I am free to carry
 her away, even as Indra, of yore, bore off Indrani.
 70 Serve my purpose and go where you list. A half
 of my kingdom will solace you for your trouble. Now,
 up and take the shape of the golden deer, dazzlingly
 beautiful ; for I am in haste to achieve my desire. We
 go together to Dandaka in my car and return to Lanka
 75 along with Seeta, all as I planned ; of course, I fight not
 with Rama. Should you still dare to gainsay me,
 I kill you on the spot. I leave you no choice in the
 affair ; you *shall* do it. They ever come to grief who
 cross the desires of their kings. Your good genius
 80 might enable you to escape with life from Rama ; but
 instant death is yours if you earn my displeasure. So,
 I have placed before you, clearly and convincingly, both
 sides of the question and leave you to act as seems
 best.”

CHAPTER XLI.

MAREECHA AGAIN DISSUADES RAVANA.

THE haughty commands of Ravana in his capacity as lord and master daunted not Mareecha in the least; ever bent upon his welfare, he spake back in severe censure: "Ravana! what sinful wretch set your feet on this path, intent upon destroying, root and branch, yourself, your children, your counsellors and your kingdom? What wicked scoundrel showed you the straight road to the mansions of Yama, jealous of your wealth, power, fame and happiness? They are your relentless foes, the base advisers who seek your defeat and death at the hands of the mighty Rama. What traitor, mean and malicious, presumed to counsel you thus, compassing your destruction through your own evil deeds? Is there none to slay with horrible tortures your counsellors that seek not to reclaim you to the path of virtue? It is the duty of honest ministers to sternly hold back the king that rushes into evil ways, all unbridled. Is there none to check you thus? Servants rise or fall with their masters. Dharma, wealth, happiness and fame accrue to them if the king is upright and virtuous; else, all is lost. Nay, the people too are engulfed in the ruin. Dharma and victory ever depend upon the king; hence, it is the duty of ministers to watch carefully that the king strays not from the path of good, under any danger, in any distress. It is but an impotent king at best who torments his people cruelly, ever seeks their ruin and gives free reins to his passions. And the ministers too perish with him, if they incite him to punish his subjects too severely. An incapable driver

is sure to bring destruction upon his master, himself, the car and the horses, when his steeds get out of hand
 35 and tear away over rough and dangerous ground. Good men and righteous, ever loyal to dharma, are yet destroyed along with their followers; should they associate with the wicked. As well set a sly fox to herd a flock of sheep as entrust the welfare of a people
 40 to a king who is their relentless foe and bitter persecutor. Have I yet any doubt that ruin terrible and complete falls upon the rakshasa race that owns as their king such a heartless, wicked and unbridled fool as you ?

45 “ I waste not a thought upon myself ; for this fate took me all unawares ; I but grieve to think of the hopeless extermination of yourself, your forces, kinsmen, wives and children. My life is forfeit to Rama, the moment he sets his eyes upon me ; and I but go to
 50 prepare your place in the halls of Death. Right glorious and auspicious do I deem my death at his hands. When I look back and meditate upon the wonderful deeds of his from the time he came to stand guard over the *yaga* of Visvamitra up to the destruction of Khara and
 55 Dooshana, the conviction is strong in me and absolute that Rama is no ordinary mortal but the supreme Lord himself. Hence, I seek my death at his hands as a passport to the highest good. At the worst, the bright worlds of the gods are mine, should I fall before the
 60 arrows of the enemy ; I prefer it infinitely to die at your hands, though you are my king, friend and kinsman. Now, Ravana ! here is my last word upon the subject ; once again do I advise you. Take me as dead the moment I set my eyes upon Rama. Should you
 65 abduct Seeta, that very moment sees the miserable end of yourself, myself, your kin, your subjects and your

kingdom. In your own interests do I dissuade you again and again; but, my words are bitter to you and unwelcome. It is no wonder, for, the unfortunate victims of Death reject the well-meant advice of the good. 70

CHAPTER XLII.

THE GOLDEN DEER.

“YOU are sure to kill me out of hand, if I go not with you; but the very first glance of Rama would scorch my life-breaths. Whoever heard 5 of any one attack him and live to tell the tale? See you not that it is but Yama in disguise has come down to slay us, the rod of Fate in his hands. Supremely wicked, brutishly obstinate as you are, I did my very best to stay your hand. Alas! I can do no more; well, 10 start if you will and let us go to meet our Doom. Yet, may all good befall you.” Boundless joy filled the heart of Ravana at the words of Mareecha. He caught him in a fond embrace and cried “Mareecha! you but raved till now. There, you speak sense and as I would have 15 it; this becomes your valour. It was some other coward of a rakshasa that was speaking to me till now. Mareecha was dead and has come to life even now. This is what the world expects of Mareecha famed for his strength, prowess and courage. This is yourself; 20 till now, you spoke like an impotent scum of a rakshasa. Now, get into this car and that quickly. These *pisacha*-visaged mules of mine will take us to the place with the speed of thought. Place Seeta in my power and go where you like; for I will take her to 25 Lanka when Rama and Lakshmana are far away from the cottage.”

Then, they mounted the *vimana*-like car and passing through many a forest, mountain, river, kingdom, city and hamlet, reached the asrama of Rama. Ravana leapt down and grasped the arm of Mareecha exclaiming "Yonder is where Rama dwells in the centre of that plantain grove; now to your work."

Forthwith, Mareecha assumed the shape of a
 35 wonderful deer and wandered about the hermitage. The tips of his horns shone like emeralds. His face was a curious blend of white and black; his mouth was as lovely as a blown lotus; his ears were like the blue lily; his lips and loins were like the *kunda* flower, or
 40 the moon, or the diamond; his sides took the color of the *madhooka* flower; his hoofs were like rubies or the filaments of the lotus; with smooth joints and clean-built limbs, he waved aloft his tail that displayed the colors of the rainbow, while the spots on his skin
 45 shone like gems. Thus through his powers of illusion, Mareecha changed himself in a moment into a deer of unseen beauty till now and set about to snare the heart of Seeta. The splendour of his form illuminated the house and the woods around. Now nibbling the tender
 50 blades of grass, now breaking off young shoots from the trees, he passed now and then through the plantain grove and rested for a while under the trees that Seeta might see him. His body gave forth every shade of colour like mountains veined with ore and was dotted
 55 with curious starlike spots, while his back was of a lovely red like the lotus. He displayed all the powers of his wonderful magic, now roaming close to the asrama, now receding from it a little, now scampering back; anon, he would vanish for a while and as suddenly
 60 rush with the speed of wind; he would frisk and gambol for a space and stretch himself down to rest as

if tired out. Occasionally, he would mix himself with the herd of deer and draw near the spot; then, he would saunter back that way along with them.

As he roamed here and there, the rakshasa-animal, 65 and cut many a wonderful caper that he might catch the eye of Seeta, the other deer approached him, mistaking him for one of themselves. Then, his smell warned them that he was a rakshasa and they fled from him in affright. He could hardly resist the temptation 70 to kill them for his dinner as they stood so near; his mouth watered thereat. But, he curbed himself by a strong effort and allowed them to escape, as it would betray his disguise and ruin his plans.

The Fates brought it about that Seeta emerged 75 from the cottage soon after and approached the groves of *asoka* and mango, gathering many a light flower with a lighter heart. This was her first visit to the forest; this was her first taste of its dangers and perils; so, she gazed with a growing wonder at the golden deer 80 adorned with gems of diverse hue. He felt her eye upon him and frisked more wonderfully than before, irradiating the woods by his sheen and splendour. Janaki was all amazed at the sight of the curious creature she had never seen before and could not take her 85 eyes off it.

CHAPTER XLIII.

“CATCH THAT DEER FOR ME.”

SHE was delighted to behold that strange animal (it was golden on one side and silvery on the 5 other) and called out to the princes, who were not long in discovering Mareecha where he browsed and frisked in a corner. Lakshmana, ever on his

guard and ever suspicious of the rakshasas, watched it attentively and said "Brother! it is no other than
 10 Mareecha whom your mercy allowed to escape his fate on a former occasion. I know that the wretch haunts these forests in the guise of a deer; he shows himself before the kings and princes that come out a-hunting and lures them to dark thickets, but to torture them to
 15 death. It is nothing for his wonderful powers of illusion to take this curious deer-form, as unreal as a *gandharvanagara* (air-castle). This beast that resembles a golden deer chased with gems does not come under in any known species on earth. It is pure
 20 glamour and no mistake." But, Seeta stopped him, for, she was under the spell of the beauty of its lovely skin and said, "My love! this deer grows upon me; it has almost captivated my heart; I *must* have it to play with; bears, monkeys, diverse deer and *kinnaras* come
 25 near our cottage; but, though I grant that they are wonderful and lovely, this creature beats them all, with its limbs of diverse shades of colour and gem-like spots. Verily, its complexion, its charming gait and the splendour of its form makes me imagine that the
 30 full moon has somehow found its way into these dark forests. And then, its symmetry, its flute-like calls, its sheen! This cunningly fashioned deer has stolen my heart away. You should manage to catch this alive, as it would be a source of boundless wonder and joy to
 35 all that behold it. We shall take it to Ayodhya when our exile is over and astonish Bharata, the queens and every one in the palace. It matters not if you cannot take it alive; its lovely skin would form a most comfortable rug to spread on the seat of *kusa*. I pray
 40 you not to be offended at me that I set you on this task to gratify a whim of mine. Well do I know that

my words are all unmeet for a loving and loyal wife ; all good people would do right to hold me in scorn and contempt. But, the marvellous beauty of this creature has enslaved my heart. It is utter presumption, nay, 45 audacity, to ask you to get it for me ; I pray you pardon me my careless and foolish request. Yet, I would have you bring it to me, if you think that it is an animal of strange beauty unseen till now."

Rama too was infected with the wonder that filled 50 Seeta's heart at the sight of that creature lighting up the woods around like the rising sun in a clear sky, with its golden fleece and horn-tips like blue emeralds. Its strange form and Seeta's request decided him to get it for her. He turned to Lakshmana and 55 said "Boy! Seeta has set her heart on possessing this deer ; and I too opine with her that its like never exists in these forests or in the gardens of Indra and Kubera. Golden spots line its fleece that grows straight and crosswise. Mark you the beauty of its tongue as it 60 peeps out from its mouth, when it yawns, like flaming fire or lambent lightning ? Its face is like a cup of green emerald ; its stomach is white like the conch or pearls of the first water. Who would not lose his heart to it, this rare creature fashioned, as it were, of gold and set 65 with diverse gems ? Kings hunt animals for sport and meat ; and it needs no request from others to catch this. Mines of gold, silver and gems are not rare to come upon in these forests ; priceless pearls are to be found in the heads of elephants ; and the king should 70 strive to possess them. Sukra and other gods have but to desire a thing to get it ; even so, kings should be on the watch to acquire and preserve the rare and natural products of the forests in preference to the triumphs of art. We cannot afford to put it off for a 75

careful enquiry, for, the teachers of the science of Polity lay it down that '*artha* rightly deserves its name when one strives to acquire a thing without stopping to inquire into the means and the chances.'

80 Now, Seeta has set her heart upon sitting with me on the skin of this curious beast. I am sure that the *kadali*, *priyaki*, *praveni*, *aviki* and other species of deer boast not of so soft a hide. Its right place is by the side of the constellation Mrigaseersha on high
85 (*mriga* means deer and *seersha* head).

"So much for the reasons adduced by Seeta; and now for your objections. It is our duty to kill this animal, if, as you guess, it is a rakshasa in disguise. This Mareecha is a cruel wretch and sinful of heart,
90 who has slain many a maharshi and tortured many a good saint. You say that, in the guise of a deer, he shows himself to the kings that come out to hunt in these woods and lures them to a pitiable death; all the more necessary that we should slay him. There lived
95 here, of yore, an asura, Vatapi by name. who harassed the hermits. He invited many brahmanas to a sṛaddha, changed himself into a sheep and managed to form a part of their dinner, but to come out later on tearing them to pieces. One day, Agastya chanced to come
100 here and the asura tried his hand upon him. But, the maharshi smiled as Vatapi essayed to break out and said: 'Wretch! this! is your dodge to bring to their deaths many a good man and holy? Like the mule that meets its death the moment it brings forth a foal, you killed
105 them as you lay in their stomachs. Hence, I pay you in your own coin when I direct my gastric fire to digest you quite.' And, Mareecha shall receive no less a reward at my hands; for, my restrained senses and loyalty to dharma demand it of me.

So, arm yourself and bend all the energies of your 110
 mind to guard Seeta from every danger ; for, full well
 do you know that all our plans hinge upon her. I will
 return with this deer, dead or alive. See you not that
 Seeta has set hêr heart upon getting it ? Its skin is all
 we want and so it cannot hope to live. You will 115
 see me back here ere long. Till then, I enjoin you to
 guard Seeta very carefully. Jatayu, our friend, is
 endowed with matchless strength, skill and ingenuity ;
 and you are sure of his help. Examine all the quarters
 every moment ; suspect danger from every point ; and 120
 watch over Janaki as carefully as you can."

CHAPTER XLIV.

DEATH OF MAREECHA.

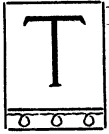
THEN Rama slung upon his back the quivers
 decked with peacock feathers, girt his golden-
 hilted sword in his belt, grasped his terrible
 bow with its three bends and raced after the
 golden deer. Mareecha wanted to lure him far ; he
 quaked in terror to see him approach like dread Fate ;
 now he vanished from view ; now he showed himself
 awhile ; now he flashed close upon Rama like a 10
 streak of lightning ; now he leapt an arrow-length ;
 now he allowed himself to be almost caught ; now
 he took a flying leap and lost himself in the skies.
 Unlike the other animals that flee the presence
 of armed man in suspicion, his appearance and dis- 15
 appearance were sudden and startling. He enticed
 Raghunatha very far, as he coursed like the moon
 passing through small cloud-drifts in autumn nights.
 Now he stood almost within touch ; but the moment

20 that Rama drew an arrow, he was miles away. Almost
 beside himself with rage at Mareecha who deceived
 him so and drew him on a fruitless chase, Raghava
 rested a little on a green sward under the trees, when
 he saw the golden deer grazing hard 'by. He started
 25 ted after it and the rakshasa vanished in terror.
 Next, he was seen emerging from a clump of trees and
 Rama resolved not to waste any more time in chasing
 him. He placed on the string an arrow that blazed as
 the rays of the sun and hissed like the Serpent of
 30 Doom : infused it with the might of *brahmastra* and shot
 it at Mareecha.

Like the vajra of Indra it clove his heart ; whereat
 he gave a dreadful roar, leapt to the height of a palm
 and fell upon the earth a lifeless bulk. But, even at the
 35 moment of his death his active brain was busy devising
 a *ruse* to induce Seeta to despatch Lakshmana after his
 brother and enable Ravana to carry her away ; so, he
 gave a mighty shout " Ha, Seeta ! Ha, Lakshmana !"
 even as Rama would have done it. Pierced to the
 40 heart, he resumed the rakshasa form, adorned with
 many a curious and priceless ornament of gold and
 gems ; he writhed on the ground in mortal agony, his
 mountainous bulk and sharp fangs making him all the
 more hideous to look at. Lakshmana's words flashed at
 45 once through the brain of Rama ; Seeta's safety was
 in danger ; " Alas ! " cried he " this is Mareecha's work.
 Lakshmana spoke true. There is no knowing what
 they would do at the asrama, when they hear these
 cries of help fall upon their ears coming as if from
 50 myself. Even in death, Mareecha has effected his fell
 purpose." His hair stood on end with fear and grief.
 Then, he shot another deer and sped back to the
 asrama with its meat upon his shoulders.

CHAPTER XLV.

SEETA SENDS LAKSHMANA AFTER RAMA.



THE piteous appeal for help sent forth by her husband pierced the heart of Seeta and she exclaimed to Lakshmana in a flood of tears 5
 “Rama is in the hands of the rakshasas and, like a noble bull in the grasp of furious lions, he looks in vain for succour. I die with grief and terror to hear him cry in helpless agony; my senses reel under the shock; fly as quick as thought to where your brother 10
 lies helpless and all alone in the forest in the grasp of his cruel foes; save him though you die for it.”

But, Lakshmana, mindful of the orders of Rama, stirred not. Whereat Seeta blazed in fury and cried “Double-dyed traitor! Base son of Kausalya’s co-wife! 15
 Relentless foe that followed him in the guise of a friend! you have not the heart to save him from mortal danger who came into the world before you? Do you pray for his death that you may possess me? That is why you stir not from here; now, I see it all—your peerless love 20
 for your brother. That explains your careless and cheerful stay here, intent on your unholy purpose. It is a shameless lie, your solicitude for my safety and your stay here therefor. What benefits it when the hero is done to death whom you and I followed here? 25
 Alas! basely, all too basely, have I been betrayed.”

And to Janaki, who cried so with streaming eyes like a startled fawn, replied Lakshmana “Mother mine! full well do you know that Rama is more than a match for the whole company of devas, asuras rakshasas, 30
 gandharvas, pannagas, men and the other created

beings. Have you ever heard of any one who could stand up to Rama in fight, whose prowess rivals that
 35 of Indra? Defeat in battle and death are not to be uttered in the same breath as Rama. It is not seemly for you to speak thus. I cannot bring myself to leave you here in this forest all alone and be far away. Mass together the might and strength of the
 40 mightiest and the strongest in all the worlds and it is as nothing before a glance of my brother. The worlds and their rulers are but as moths that rush to a cruel death in the fire of Rama's anger. Grieve not ; put away care and apprehension from your heart ; very
 45 soon will he be among us and relate how he slew the wonderful deer. It is not his voice we heard ; it is the glamour of some wily rakshasa. Doubtless it is Mareecha's magic ; it is his voice. Rama has entrusted your safety to me ; and I see not how I could leave you
 50 here. Ever since he destroyed Khara and Dooshana at Janasthana, the rakshasas wait to do him an evil turn ; their sole delight is to torture others ; they could disguise their voice any way. Let it not trouble you."

Seeta's eyes reddened with wrath at the words of
 55 Lakshmana ; and she tortured the heart of the truthful prince with many a cruel taunt, " Wicked, heartless, cruel, sinful ! Parricide, that is born to blast the fair fame of the Ikshwaku race ! how long have you been praying for such a danger to Rama, that you
 60 may win me to your arms ? Else, you would have spoken differently when he is in the grip of Death. Yet, it is no wonder that you should speak thus, seeing you are but the son of the co-wife of Kausalya. You fellows are noted for your cruelty, wickedness, hypo-
 65 crisy and there is nothing you dare not. Was it for this that you followed us to the woods, a model of

devotion and obedience? How long have you set your foul slimy heart upon possessing me? Stay, may be you are the miserable emissary of Bharata? You shall be foiled in your fell purpose; would I waste a thought 70 upon such disgusting insects as you, when I glory in calling Rama the hero as my lord and husband? I have no life apart from him, not even a moment."

At these terrible words of Seeta that caused the hair to stand on end, Lakshmana took no offence (for, 75 of stern self-control was he and noble of heart); he folded his hands in deep respect and replied all gently "Mother! you are unto me as my god. I dare not gainsay you. Yet, I submit that it is no wonder that women are tempted to speak words all unseemly. It is 80 ever their way: modesty, patience, shyness they are strangers too; it is nothing to them, nay, it is a real delight to them, to pierce the hearts of men with words of wanton cruelty and sharp malice and drive into enmity their best friends and well-wishers. Yet, 85 my heart rebels to hear the cruel, merciless words that fell from your lips. I wonder how you came to be born as the daughter of Janaka the wise. What curious turn of racial karma sent you to take birth in the line of the Videhas, adorned with noble excellences? 90 These words of yours fall upon my ears like deadly *narachas* and pierce my heart. You dared to speak to me these cruel words all unjustly, whose feet never strayed from the path of virtue? I call to witness all the beings in this forest. Better you were dead that 95 suspected me of such a foul and terrible crime. Fie upon you! It were a great boon to the worlds if you die where you stand. Wickedness and malignity are ingrained in the hearts of women, it seems. Do you call yourself a woman, one of the gentler sex and have 100

the audacity to speak to me so, who know no other law but the command of Rama, more a father to me? Well, I go to him." He checked himself as he recollected his brother's orders. "Alas! fool I was to lose my
105 temper and speak harshly to Janaki, who is as a mother unto me in every way." Out of a repentant heart, he said to her again "May all good be thine. May danger and peril be far from you. Rama entrusted you to my care and I place you under the protection of
110 the guardian Spirits of this forest. The evil omens that I see fill me with doubts of our seeing you again." He could not tear himself away from his charge, seeing which, Seeta broke into a flood of tears, beat her stomach with her hands and sent forth frenzied
115 screams and cries. "Lakshmana! this moment you go to bring back Rama; else, I jump into the waters of the Godaveri, or strangle myself, or fall headlong from the heights, or drink deadly poison, or cast myself into the blazing fire. Would I waste a glance at any other
120 but my lord Raghunatha or touch him with my foot?"

Lakshmana tried his very best to console Seeta who hissed forth like an angry serpent and would have her way. She only cried "Sinful wretch! Cheat! Traitor! you would find some excuse or other to stay
125 here a while?" and turned her back upon him as if rage choked her words. Then, Lakshmana saluted her reverently and took leave of her with joined palms. With an anxious heart did he follow in the wake of Rama, casting many a glance at Seeta whom he was
130 all loath to leave alone behind him in that dreadful forest.

CHAPTER XLVI.

RAVANA THE SANYASI.

ALL unwilling, Lakshmana proceeded slowly on his way, driven from his post by the venomous words of Seeta ; and Ravana, who lay in wait for such a chance, drew near the asrama in the garb of a sanyasi—orange robes, tuft of hair, sacred thread, sunshade, wooden sandals, staff and water pot. Like a pall of darkness advancing to swallow the evening sky, vacant of sun and moon, looked he on his way to abduct Seeta, unprotected by Rama and Lakshmana. Ravana, the cruel demon, cast his eyes upon Janaki even as the cruel-eyed Saturn scorches with his baleful glances the constellation Rohini that is away from the moon. The very trees in the forest of Janasthana stood dead and motionless as it were, awed by the glory and terrible deeds of that rakshasa at whose name the worlds quaked in fear. The winds were hushed into silence. The Godaveri stilled her rapid waters to a slower course ; for, who knows that his lightning glances might not fall upon her and note her forward gait ? He was counting the moments until Rama and Lakshmana should leave the asrama ; then he cloaked his wickedness under the of a sanyasi and drew near Seeta as she sat there alone, her sad thoughts far away with Rama, even as Saturn on his path to absorb the constellation Chitra. Like a ruined well hidden under a luxuriant growth of grass, he burnt Seeta with his unholy looks through the sanyasi robes that disguised the rakshasa but all too thinly. She sat there clothed in garments of flowing white silk, in the witching beauty of her charming lips, pearly teeth,

eyes that shamed the beauty of blown lotuses and face that could very well take the place of the Queen of
 35 night in her full-orbed radiance ; tears coursed along her cheeks as she recalled the danger that Rama was even then going through. His heart filled with black thoughts and blinded with an unholy passion, he drew near her reciting many a vedic text. The splendour of
 40 her complexion and her noble perfections reft him of his senses. “ Never have my eyes been blessed with such a sight in all the worlds. I guess it is the goddess Sree that has elected to leave her lotus-seat to walk among mortals for a while.” All at once he
 45 broke into boundless praise, but skillful and humble.

“ Deign to enlighten my ignorant self as to who you may be—Mahalakshmi, Sree, the Goddess of the earth, Fame, Fortune, Love or apsaras—who, garbed in white silk like a pond of blown lotuses, dazzle my eyes
 50 with the sheen of your form that resembles molten gold of a thousand and eight carats. Who may you be that roam here at your sweet will ? Your teeth are even, white, pointed and perfect. Your eyes are large, broad, clear as crystal and slightly veined with red. Yours
 55 thighs are like the trunks of elephants. Your hips are spacious and high. Your breasts are large, full, round and swelling, close-set like palm fruits and adorned by garlands of gold. Your eyes, your teeth, your smile and your indefinable grace have stolen my
 60 senses. Your charms and noble excellences make a sad havoc of my heart as a raging flood undermines the banks. Your wasp-like waist and lovely tresses that cluster round your head like bees on a lotus, would melt a soul of adamant. Devas, gandharvas,^c yakshas,
 65 kinnaras and mortals have yielded to me their grandest and most perfect specimens of womanly beauty. Yet,

I fail to guess what brought you to live a lonely life in these forests, and you endowed with such a form, grace, youth, symmetry and perfection. You are all unmeet to dwell in these haunts of cruel rakshasas. 70 Flee these spots ; for, the wretches are of inconceivable strength, cunning and powers of illusion. Lordly mansions, lovely pleasure-gardens, rich perfumes, bright dresses and a splendid retinue would form a fitter setting for your beauty. Priceless garments, jewels, 75 and garlands should wait upon your choice and a husband of peerless perfection. Who are you ? I take it you are a deva lady. The Rudras, Maruts, Vasus and the other celestial orders—which do you belong to ? Gandharvas, devas or kinnaras do not affect these 80 spots very much ; for, the rakshasas have it all to themselves here. What has led your steps to this place ? How is it you show no fear at the sight of the monkeys, lions, leopards, tigers, panthers, deer, bears and vultures around you ? How is it you roam fear- 85 lessly and all alone through these woods where mighty elephants tear and trumpet in their rut ? Who are you and whose ? Whence are you and why ? What do you here in this terrible forests of Dandaka, the home of the rakshasas ? ” 90

Seeta put away behind her his unseemly words and offered him due hospitality. She gave him a seat and announced that his dinner awaited him. Though garbed as a brahmana ascetic, his thoughts were ever busy with her abduction ; he was not there to accept of her 95 hospitality or to dine at her asrama. He was after quite a different welcome. Trained and educated under the eye of Janaka, the wise, she was well conversant with the dharma and the life of sanyasins ; she read through his disguise, but, out of respect for the cloth, she 100

would honour him. She could not bring her heart to hate or scorn him, and said “ Holy sir ! pray accept this seat ; here is water to wash your feet ; and there is ready for you what poor fare these woods can afford. Make yourself at home.”

But the sinful wretch directed his thoughts upon carrying her away as Janaki, the wedded wife of Ramachandra, offered him the noble welcome due to an honoured guest ; and all unwittingly did he invite his doom. Seeta expected every moment to see her husband return from his deer-hunt along with Lakshmana whom she sent after him ; she cast frightened glances all around and tried to pierce through the dark woods that seemed to close upon her ; but the heroes came not.

CHAPTER XLVII.

RAVANA AND SEETA.

THUS addressed by Ravana all unseemingly, Seeta said to herself “ This is a brahmana and our guest ; though disguised as an ascetic, he might perchance curse me if I reply to him not.” She paused a little and said “ Sir, I am the daughter of Janaka, the king of the Videhas and Seeta they call me. I am the wife of Rama, the first-born of Dasaratha, king of the Kosalas. Twelve happy years did I spend in the house of the Ikshwaku monarchs, in the enjoyment of everthing that my heart could desire. The next year, Dasaratha took counsel with his ministers and resolved to crown Rama as Prince Regent. When the preparation were afoot for the coronation, Kaikeyi, one of the queens, managed that the king should swear upon

his stored merit that he would grant her the boons she might ask. There were two of them—my husband should spend fourteen years of exile in the forests and her son Bharata should sit upon the throne. ‘Know, 20 righteous king!’ said she ‘I put away from me food and sleep; my death lies at your door if you should dare to crown Rama’ He was bound to her by strong ties of favours done him in the past; of a sensitive and finely-balanced nature, he sought to dissuade her by reason, 25 argument, presents, gifts, prayers, entreaties, and every method known to him; but, she heeded him not. Now, my husband was in the prime of youth and fitted in every way to drink deep of the golden cup of life and its joys; he was endowed with every noble perfection 30 of an emperor; so it was all unjust to consign him to a living death in the forests. Of matchless splendour, he was twenty-five when he began his exile and I was seventeen. Rama is famed in all the worlds for his purity of heart, straightness of speech and superhuman 35 excellences. With large starlike eyes, long stout arms that reach below his knees like elephant’s trunks, the welfare of all beings is ever nearest his heart. His father Dasaratha, albeit of matchless glory, was enslaved by the love he bore to Kaikeyi and would not 40 say her nay; so, Rama was not to be crowned. My husband was sent for by his father (to be advised upon his new functions, as he thought); Kaikeyi had the heart and audacity to say ‘Rama! I speak to you by your father’s request. You are to hand over this 45 kingdom to my Bharata, safe and sound and abide in the forests for fourteen years. Do this or brand your father with the sin of black falsehood.’ Now, Rama is never known to go back upon his word. He ever gives but never takes from others; 50

ever straight of speech, his lips have never been soiled with an untruth ; and this is the life to which he has dedicated himself.

“ Sumitra, the second queen of Daśaratha, is the
 55 mother of prince Lakshmana. A matchless hero, he is the terror of his foes and the faithful shadow of Rama. We have come down to these forests in obedience to the commands of the king. The princes abide here garbed like hermits, with restrained senses and heart
 60 centred on dharma, but, armed to the teeth. We have turned our backs upon the kingdom, thanks to the attentions of Kaikeyi and our dharma it is that watches over our safety in these perilless woods. This hermitage is pure and holy and you may rest here awhile. My
 65 husband will be here very soon with such fare as the forest affords. I would like to know, in truth, your name, family and clan. What makes you roam all alone through these woods ? ”

Ravana rejoiced to find a chance offered to him to
 70 descant upon his lineage and exploits and said, “ Seeta ! I am the lord of the rakshasas, the famous ruler of Lanka, the holy terror of all the worlds and the beings therein. Ravana am I named. From the moment I set my eyes upon you in your garment of white silk that
 75 is a poor foil to your complexion of fine molten gold, my heart turns from my wives with disgust. Countless are the ladies, the best of their class, whom I have carried away from the worlds above and below ; and I entreat you to be their queen and mistress. Lanka,
 80 my capital, is cunningly erected by Maya on mount Trikoota. Your days shall pass in a dream of bliss along with me on hill slopes, in forests and gardens. 'Hateful and repulsive will seem to you the life you are leading now. Be my wife and five thousand tirewomen and

maids wait upon you, young, beautiful and flashing 85
with gold and gems."

Seeta was mad with rage at these unholy words ;
she cast a glance of withering contempt upon the sinful
wretch and cried " Monster of wickedness, whom did
you take me for, that you rave so? My lord and hus- 90
band is impregnable as mount Meru, unapproachable as
the deep ocean, of matchless valour like Mahendra ;
and I strive to practise the dharma he has set him-
self to. He is crowned with every noble perfection.
Like a wide-spreading banyan, he deserves to be the 95
refuge of all beings. Ever loyal to truth, his nobility
of heart is something inconceivable ; and I humbly
follow in his footsteps. With long and powerful arms,
a deep spacious chest, a gait like that of a maddened
lion, he is a lion among men ; he is endowed with the 100
strength, courage and daring of a lion ; and his face is as
charming as the full-orbed moon. Of stern self-control,
his fame illuminates the worlds ; and him do I humbly
seek to imitate.

" How dare you raise your eyes to me even as a 105
jackal set his heart upon a lordly lioness ? Would you
separate the sun from his glory and splendour ? Even
so, would you carry me away from the side of Rama ?
The hour of your death strikes and you see before your
glazed eyes, trees of gold : else, your heart would never 110
desire me, the beloved wife of Rama. Would you thrust
your arm into the cavernous mouth of a hungry lion to
break its teeth ? Would you place your fingers between
the jaws of the Serpent of doom to extract its deadly
fangs ? Would you seek to play at ball with mount 115
Mandara ? Would you try live a healthy life upon a
diet of Kalakoota, (the poison that was drunk by Siva) ?
Would you scratch your eyes with sharp needles, or,

lick the keen blade of a sword? Would you swim
 120 across the boundless ocean with a huge rock tied round
 your neck? Would you snatch at the sun and the
 moon or enfold the blazing fire in your garments?
 Would you walk on the sharp prongs of tridents? Else,
 you would never dare to dream of me, the pure and
 125 beloved wife of Rama.

“A lion is Rama; and a base jackal you are. The
 • fathomless ocean is Rama; and a dirty rill you are. A
 sweet and priceless beverage is Rama; and foul-smelling
 vinegar you are. Molten gold of a thousand and eight
 130 carats is Rama; base dull lead you are. A delicious
 sandal paste is Rama; filthy slimy mire you are. An
 elephant in rut is Rama; a puny cat you are. The
 monarch of all birds, Garuda, is Rama; a thieving crow
 you are. A peacock of dazzlingly beautiful feathers is
 135 Rama; an ugly water-fowl you are. A lordly swan is
 Rama; a bald repulsive vulture you are. What a world
 of difference between you and him! As well might a
 gnat swallow a large diamond and hope to digest
 it. Grant that you carry me away; could you keep
 140 me safe, while the mighty bow of Rama extends over
 me the shadow of its protection? You but invite your
 death in my guise.”

Boldly did she rebuke Ravana, the pure and gentle
 Janaki; yet, she trembled like a plantain in a gale
 145 through the fear she strove to conceal. It did not
 escape the keen eyes of Ravana. “She is mine if I
 frighten her enough;” and the sinful wretch, strong
 and powerful as Death, began to hold forth upon his
 birth, strength, fame and terrible exploits.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

RAVANA AND SEETA (*continued.*)

T
 HEREAT,* Ravana knit his dark brows in a terrible frown and spoke in accents of cruel malignity. “Lovelier far than a flash of 5 golden lightning! Kubera and I are sons of the same father, but of different mothers. Ravana and Dasagreeva are names in the mouth of every one. As all beings shun in terror the Lord of death, devas, gandharvas, pisachas, patagas, uragas and daityas flee 10 from my presence. I fought with Kubera for some trivial cause and held him at my mercy. He fled in mad terror from Lanka, his capital, the home of luxury and wealth, and ever after hides himself in the Kailasa. I deprived him of the vimana Pushpaka that carries the 15 owner where he lists. Indra and his hosts dare not face me in my wrath. The lord of Air blows where I am but with a trembling heart. The sun tones down his rays until they are as cool as those of the moon. The trees dare not stir a leaf; the rivers would not so much 20 as move a drop of water, but must stand still. It is thus wherever I chance to be, wherever I roam and wherever I cast my eyes.

“Lanka is my capital, even as Amaravati is that of Indra. Girt by the fathomless ocean, ever guarded 25 by terrible rakshasas, it is adorned with fortifications of silver, mansions of gold and gates set with priceless gems. Myriads of troops watch over its safety, matchless in strength, courage and valour. The sweet melody of music, dance and song is ever wafted over the 30 trackless wastes of waters. The gardens are full of rare and curious trees that offer their tribute of fruits

and flowers at all seasons. Spend your days there in happiness with me as your devoted servant and never
 35 will a thought cross your mind of mortal woman or deva and their joys and pleasures.

“Rama is the first-born of Dasaratha, his heir by right; but, a woman snatched the crown from him and drove him to the woods. His life and prowess, what
 40 a mockery! A mere mortal, would you waste a thought upon him? How could he stead you, weak, lustreless, dull-witted, a nameless being that sought refuge in the hermit’s garb as a last resort? The rakshasas in all the countless worlds are proud to call me their king; and I
 45 seek you out to win your love. It becomes you not to reject my suit. Urvashi, of yore, tried it with Purooravas, but, her remorse and grief drove her at last to his feet; take heed that you do not repeat the error. I have to lift my little finger on the battle-field and Rama is
 50 nowhere. A mere mortal, he! Seek happiness, wealth and power in my arms who, thanks to your good fortune, have sought you out.”

Thus beset with base, plausible and insidious counsels, praised, flattered, threatened, cajoled and
 55 scoffed at, Seeta but waxed wroth and, with eyes flashing fire, she poured a storm of invectives upon Ravana. A mere mortal woman; lone and defenceless in the heart of a terrible forest; here was Ravana who, utterly forgot his dread strength, valour, fame, wealth and
 60 cruel nature, laid at her feet his proud head that had bowed to none, placed his kingdom and his wealth at her disposal and piteously entreated to be allowed to win her love; yet, she spurned him away; he was as worthless in her eyes as a withered leaf or blade of
 65 grass; she heaped scorn, censure and contempt upon his head; verily, inconceivable is the strength of

chastity and loyalty. “Base plotter! Kubera, your brother, is a great and noble lord, who rightly deserves the respect and esteem of all the worlds. You came into the world after him and rejoice in such a black 70 heart. Verily, the shadow of death and destruction grows upon the rakshasas, who are cursed with such a king, heartless, evil-minded, weak and cruel. Easier to hope to survive the abduction of Indrani of matchless loveliness from the side of Indra: but 75 abandon all hopes of life, should you dare to carry me away, the beloved wife of Raghava—it matter not that you have drunk of the Waters of Immortality.”

CHAPTER XLIX

THE ABDUCTION OF SEETA.

RAVANA, of boundless fame, was beside himself with rage at these well-deserved taunts; he struck his palms together, assumed a form 5 huge as a mountain and cried “Girl! I take it that my strength, courage and achievements have not reached your ears. When I behold you scornful and indifferent towards me even after I have enlightened you thereupon, I am tempted to think that you are 10 clean daft. I can stand in mid-air, supportless and root up this globe with my hands; I can drink up this boundless waste of waters; I can fight with Death and prove *his* death; my arrows can stay the sun’s course at its height; I can shatter the world to atoms; I can 15 change my shape with the speed of thought; ask of me what boons you will have. I deign to cast a loving eye upon you and you heed me not and speak to me harshly. Verily, you have taken leave of your senses.”

20 He then stood in his native shape. His eyes, that
 rivalled the sun in splendour and the fire in consuming
 energy, were red and tawny at the edges. Armed
 from head to foot, adorned with priceless garments and
 jewels, he resembled huge cloud-banks." He put away
 25 from him the handsome and peaceful form of a sanyasi
 that he came in and assumed another terrible to
 behold as that of the Lord of destruction. Blind with
 wrath, he stood before Seeta, fixed her with his baleful
 eyes as if he would scorch her beauty and cried "Do
 30 you aspire to be the wife of the best and foremost of
 all creation ? ; then accept my suit. I am in every way
 fitted to be your husband ; untold ages of happiness are
 yours as my wife. The worlds hold not my equal ; I
 have lost my heart to you ; your lightest word is a
 35 law unto me now and ever. Turn your heart away
 from that slight mortal and let me find favour in your
 eyes. Fool, who thinks herself all-wise ! what do you see
 in Rama, what rare excellences, except that he is
 shamefully exiled from the kingdom and is an object of
 40 contempt to all ? Find me another idiot who, at a word
 from a woman, would surrender kingdom, happiness and
 friends and dwell in these haunts of fierce beasts even
 as one of them."

At the worst, Seeta deserved the love, respect and
 45 kindness she showed to Ravana ; but, the wicked
 monster was dead to all such nobler instincts ; mad
 with lust and passion, he lifted her aloft, taking hold of
 her lovely tresses with the left hand while he passed
 the right under her knees. The Guardian spirits of the
 50 forests fled in terror at the sight of Ravana with his
 mountainous body, twice ten arms like great serpents
 and eyes blazing with anger like the Lord of time. At
 once there stood beside him his magical car, adorned

with gold and gems, drawn by huge mules and thundering like dark rain clouds. Then, he frightened her still 55 more by cruel threats, caught her legs together and lifted her into his carriage. Seeta of spotless fame, thus wantonly outraged by Ravana, could not contain her grief and called in piteous tones upon her husband who was even then speeding back through the dark 60 forests. The rakshasa forced his loathsome love upon the unwilling one who shrunk from him with terror and drove fast, one of his hands holding her down as she writhed in impotent agony at the bottom of the car, even as a mean and repulsive creature attempted 65 to carry away the wife of the king of the nagas.

As he coursed through the sky, Janaki was almost demented with grief and terror and filled the woods with her cries and laments, "Lakshmana! Prince of heroes! Matchless in your devotion to your elders! 70 would that you saw me in the grasp of this Ravana who kidnaps me in revenge for the death of Khara and Dooshana. Raghunandana! you never bestow a thought on your life, happiness or wealth when it is a question of those that have taken refuge with you. Then, see 75 you not that this base-born brute carries me away in defiance of all justice, human and divine? Noble lord, that has come down upon earth to destroy the wicked and protect the good! how is it that Ravana, this worst of sinners, alone enjoys immunity? Perhaps the 80 sins of the wicked do not bear fruit right away; many are the factors that go to ripen an ear of corn; even so Time is an important element in the fructification of karma. Ravana! I see the fingers of Death upon your throat; that alone explains this mad sin of yours, 85 so utterly heinous. So, Rama is your Fate. I ween that now at least would Kaikeyi and her following

rejoice when they hear that the wife of Rama, of peerless fame and righteous soul, has been carried away
 90 by a rakshasa. Full well do I know every step of her nefarious plot—Seeta will not stay behind if Rama is driven to the woods ; the rakshasas there are sure to kidnap her ; that will be the death of Rama ; Lakshmana will not survive him long ; then Bharata is safe
 95 on the throne, without a rival.’

“Stately trees of Janasthna! bear the news to Rama, as quickly as you can, that Ravana carries me away. Mount Malyavan! mount Prasaravana! lose no time in acquainting Rama with my abduction at the hands of
 100 Ravana. Goddess of the Godavari, the happy home of swans, herons, storks and other water-fowl! I salute you ; carry tidings that Seeta is violently dragged away by Ravana. I salute the Spirits of the trees here ; take word to Rama of my danger and misfortune.
 105 I seek refuge of all the creatures in this forest ; I am torn away from my home like a helpless waif, by this wicked Ravana ; let Rama know it as soon as you can, for, dearer than life am I to him. Stay not for fear of Ravana. Let him but know, my Raghuveera, and his
 110 might and valour are enough to bring me back, though this fool hide me in any of the countless worlds, though he entrusts me to the care of Yama. So, fail me not.”

As she wailed and lamented piteously on her way, she espied Jatayus resting on a tree. Albeit she was in
 115 the cruel grasp of Ravana, she snatched courage to exclaim in accents that faltered from grief and fear “ Truest friend of my lord ! behold this miserable sinner Ravana carries me away by force as if I was a helpless outcast. Do not seek to resist him. Trained and
 120 hardened in a hundred fights, armed to the teeth, he is a treacherous foe and master of mighty magic ; so, I

entreat you to acquaint Rama and Lakshmana in full with what has befallen me."

CHAPTER L.

JATAYUS RESISTS RAVANA.

NO sooner did the words fall upon the ear of Jatayus as he closed his eyes in tired sleep than he awoke with a start and, glancing around, saw 5 Ravana bear away Seeta in his car. His body was huge as a mountain peak; his sharp beak and sharper talons were his only weapons; the monarch of the feathered creation, he was the foremost of those to whom it was given to serve the Lord. From his lofty perch he 10 cried "Dasamukha! my trust is in the service of the Lord that has been the glorious heritage of all good men from time out of memory. The Supreme Self is my stay and refuge, as manifested to us as Truth, Wisdom and Bliss. He is himself the Means and the Goal. I 15 am the king of vultures and eagles; my name is Jatayus and my strength boundless—this is what I am, the Servant.

"Next let me speak somewhat of the nature of my lord and master. Rama, the son of the emperor 20 Dasaratha, is the lord of the myriad worlds: equal in might and glory to Indra, Varuna and the other Regents of the quarters, his heart is ever centred on the welfare of all beings. Hence, he is *your* king as well. 25

"Seeta, whom you now seek to abduct, is the beloved wife of that Lord of the worlds; she follows the same dharma as her husband; she is famed beyond compare for her graces of body and mind. Should you"

30 not acknowledge Rama as your master, should you
 count him but as a man, yet you act in defiance of all
 dharma. Yourself a mighty king, entrusted with the
 preservation of law and order, how could you even
 dream of ontraging the wives of others? Further, it is
 35 your bounden duty to protect the wives of other kings
 like yourself. Should you refuse to recognise Rama as
 a king, know you not that to kidnap the wives of
 others is a base, unworthy act? Would one of your
 intellectual height stoop to an act held in scorn and
 40 contempt by others? The safety of the wives of others
 should be as dear to us as the safety of our own.
 Righteous kings set not their hearts upon such Aims of
 life as are not sanctioned by the sastras. It is all
 unworthy of a ruler like you, however the ordinary run
 45 of men behave themselves. Though not for yourself,
 yet, you must never stray from dharma if you hold dear
 the welfare of the countless millions around you. The
 king is the fountain of dharma, health and happiness.
 As is the king, so are his subjects; hence, it behoves
 50 the ruler to ever eschew sin and evil and be the fore-
 most exponent of dharma. Besides, lusting after other
 women lays the axe at the root of wealth and prosperity.
 Like a miserable sinner in the seats of the gods, I won-
 der how you are master of such boundless power,
 55 wealth and might—and you addicted to sin and crime
 and steeped in low sensual pleasures! Of a truth, they
 are bound to take wings and fly away if your heart is
 persistently set on adharma.

“I see my well-meant advice is thrown away upon
 60 you. It is no wonder you cannot master your unholy
 passions, seeing that they run in your blood. So, words
 of wisdom are bound to fail in the case of wicked
 ‘wretches like yourself. Do you say that ‘it is in my

nature to carry away by force the women of my foe ? ' Well, bring forth one crime, one act of injustice committed by Rama in your dominions or in your capital ? No, not one ; then, why seek to injure him, the soul of valour and righteousness ? Do you count the death of Khara at his hands as an injury done to yourself ? Khara took up arms in defence of Soorpanakha and forced a fight upon Rama ; he transgressed the bounds of law and propriety and met his death at the hands of Rama who knows not what it is to harm others. Ponder well and tell me wherein Rama has injured you. Speak the truth ; is there a scrap, a shred of reason why you should carry away the wife of Rama, the lord of the worlds ?

“ Quit hold of Seeta ; else you will be consumed to ashes by the angry glance of Rama, even as Indra offered the life of the asura Vritra as a victim to his bolts.

“ How carelessly and merrily do you go about with the deadliest serpent slung over your shoulders, knotted at the corner of your robe ! The noose of Yama is round your neck and not the slightest touch of fear do you feel ! It is but rank folly and perilous for one to essay to lift a weight beyond his strength. One should eat of what he could easily digest and with safety to himself. No prudent person would ever engage himself in what would surely bring upon him pain of body and loss of life. Dharma, fame and happiness are worthier aims in comparison.

90

“ Slight me not because I am advanced in years. The cares and anxieties of ruling my subjects have weakened me a little. I have no weapons but my beak and talons ; you are in the flower of youth and strength and have bow, arrows, armour, car and other warlike gear ; yet hope not to go from here unscathed. The vedic texts are authoritative in themselves ; would you

expect an adept in the mysteries thereof to stand by
 and listen while they are being forced to render quite
 100 contrary meanings through the application of logical
 inference and analogy ? He but shatters himself to death
 against the unshaken rock of vedas who would tamper
 with them. Now, Seeta is such a vedic text ; I am an
 adept in the mysteries of her greatness and mission ;
 105 would I stand by and see her carried away by a
 worthless scoundrel like you ? You but shatter yourself
 to nothing against her. If you have the faintest spark
 of manhood or valour or heroism in you, wait a little ;
 Rama is even now near ; front him in battle and in the
 110 twinkling of an eye he will send you to keep company
 with your brother. Myriads of daityas, danavas and
 devas have been defeated and tormented by you. Rama
 is their lord ; and *that* is another reason why he should
 chastise you. I tell you that Ramachandra will slay
 115 you in battle, clad though he be in deerskin and dress
 of bark. What a pity they are so far away ! Would
 they were here this moment ! It is plain to me that you
 flee in fear of them. Let that be. Do you hope to take
 her away while I live, the beloved wife of Raghuveera
 120 and the loveliest woman that the worlds ever saw ? It
 behoves me to ward off, even with my life, any danger
 from my friend Dasaratha and my dear high-souled
 boy, Rama. Stay, flee not. Do you pride yourself upon
 your ten heads and twenty arms ? Are you not my
 125 dear and honoured guest ? I offer you the highest
 rites of hospitality by fighting with you as long as
 there is breath in my body. I will lop off your ten
 heads as if they were so many palm fruits.

CHAPTER LI.

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH.

THESE• just and reasonable words of Jatayu but inflamed Ravana the more and fire flashed from his twenty eyes. He sprang at Jatayu in dreadful rage and a terrible fight ensued between them in that desolate forest, even as if two cloud banks or two mount Malyavans dashed against one another. 5

• Then Ravana directed at Jatayu a ceaseless shower of naleekas, narachas, vikarnis and other sharp arrows. 10 The bird shattered them to pieces with his wings and his sharp talons dug deep into and lacerated the huge bulk of Ravana ; whereupon the giant resolved to finish his strange assailant and shot ten arrows sharp as the rod of Time.• Jatayu was filled with redoubled fury and 15 strength at the sight of Seeta writhing in the car in agony and blinding tears ; he heeded not the dread shafts, but sprang upon Ravana and shattered the bow and arrows to pieces, with a stroke of his powerful legs. The rakshasa at once grasped another bow 20 and sent a ceaseless stream of arrows from it, by thousands and ten thousands, almost imprisoning Jatayu in their midst, like a silkworm in its cocoon. The vulture-king made short work of the bow and the arrows with a few blows of his pinions and legs ; the 25 magical armour of his foe that shone like fire was riven to pieces by the impact of the gale from his wings. He killed the mules yoked to the car (swift as the wind, with the face of pisachas and clothed in golden armour), broke the car to pieces, destroyed the umbrellas, chama- 30 ras and those that bore them and finished by biting off the head of the driver. Deprived of car, driver,

horses, bows and arrows, Ravana leapt to the ground with Seeta in his arms. Thereat all beings praised
 35 Jatayu for his matchless valour.

Ravana noticed with joy that his foe was a little fatigued with age and exertions and sprang into the air with Seeta. But the vulture king barred his way and cried "Fool! do you hope to carry away by
 40 force the wife of Raghuveera whose shafts are as deadly as the vajra? The destruction of the entire rakshasa race is close at hand. Yourself, your friends, kinsmen, ministers, followers and troops quaff countless goblets of poisoned wine to allay your burning thirst. A speedy
 45 death is the lot of those who engage themselves in acts without any idea of where they would land them; and you are the brightest example of it. Have you seen a fish alive when the sharp hook has gone down its throat? Do you hope to escape from Rama with the noose of Death
 50 tightening round your neck? Do you expect the heroes to forgive you who have stolen away Seeta from their cottage when they were away? Like a base thief, you hid yourself in fear while they were with her and later, crowned yourself with eternal infamy and
 55 contempt. A nice warrior and hero you are! Wait awhile; Rama would be here; fight with him if you can and you will take your place by the side of Khara your brother. You have committed a crime that will shorten your years and bring instant death upon
 60 you. Even the Lord of worlds, the self-existent One, would never dare to commit an act that is sure to result in sin."

Meanwhile Ravana heeded not the golden counsel of Jatayu, but was beating a rapid retreat; noticing
 65 which, the bird sprang after him, lighted upon his back, dug his sharp cruel claws deep into his body and

limbs, even as the driver brings under control a mad elephant with frequent thrusts of the sharp goad. He plucked his hair by the roots, plunged his sharp beak into his back and tore away huge lumps of flesh. 70 Unable to bear the agony, Ravana trembled with rage and, with quivering lips, turned to fight the obstinate foe. With one of his arms he held Seeta a safe prisoner, while he shot out a terrible blow with the other at Jatayu. But, the heroic bird bit off the ten 75 hands that held Seeta; when, lo! they appeared again like deadly serpents springing from their holes with poisonous fumes. Then, Ravana let go Seeta and struck at the bird with his fists and feet. Thus, the rakshasa-king and the vulture-king fought with unabated fury 80 for over an hour; at the end of which, Ravana profited by a chance to hew off with his sharp sword the pinions and feet of Jatayu, who fought so nobly for his master Raghuveera. And the lord of the vultures fell to the earth in the agonies of death. Ravana rejoiced to see him 85 lie there a shapeless mass like a black cloud or a spent forest-fire. But, dire grief filled the heart of Seeta as if she had lost every one near and dear to her; she ran to where lay her friend and defender the heroic bird with snow-white breast, the blood streaming in torrents from 90 his countless wounds, caught him to her breast and lifted her voice in piteous lament.

CHAPTER LII.

THE ABDUCTION OF SEETA (*continued*.)

“THE twitching of the eyes and limbs, the cries of birds and other signs, ominous and otherwise, foretell mortals their coming joys and sorrows. 5

Rama ! I see beasts and birds on their way to where you are to acquaint you with my misery and danger ; so, be here with the speed of thought and save me from this wicked rakshasa. Your friend, the vulture-
 10 king has done his very best to defend me and has sacrificed his life in the attempt. Rama ! Lakshmana ! run to my help." Thus trembling with fear, she called upon them as if they were hard by, all forgetting that they were far, far away.

15 Ravana ordered her to come away more than once, as with disordered garments she wept upon the body of her friend. He tore her away from him and she writhed on the ground like a creeper torn by the roots ; he snatched her up, but she caught at the trees on the
 20 way and shouted " Rama ! Rama !" to the merciless and desolate forests. Then as Yama casts his noose round the doomed creatures and draws them towards him, Ravana caught her by the hair of the head and tore her away. He laid the axe at the root of his life,
 25 power, fame, wealth and race.

At the sight of the horrible outrage perpetrated on Seeta, all beings, animate and inanimate, lost their nature and properties. The whole universe was engulfed in a black pall of ignorance ; winds blew not ; the
 30 sun vanished from view. Brahma saw with his eye of wisdom this wanton insult offered to Seeta by Ravana ; he rejoiced thereat and exclaimed. " The Lord has achieved his purpose." The saints and sages in the Dandaka could not bear to behold the misery and woe
 35 that crushed Seeta ; but, their souls rejoiced to see that Ravana achieved *his* purpose in inviting his fate. Meanwhile he coursed with the speed of thought along the aerial routes with Seeta on his shoulders piteously calling upon Rama and Lakshmana, like a huge dark

rain cloud through which played the golden flashes of lightning. The winds tossed her garments over him, like a mountain peak enveloped with roaring flames. The lotus petals from her garlands rained upon him as if they meant to indicate the coming ruin and shattering of his power, wealth and fame. Her upper garment, bright with gold, brushed him now and then, like a coppery cloud in the midday splendour of the sun. The face of Seeta lost its glory like an uprooted lotus, as she sat in the lap of Ravana; for, it was not touched by the glances of Rama, like unto the sun in splendour and energy, to make it blossom. Like the full moon passing through a dark cloud-drift, appeared Seeta by the side of Ravana, with her lovely tresses, broad forehead, white pearly teeth and complexion of the blown lotus. Her charming countenance, adorned with every grace of feature and form, was caked with the dirt of fast-falling tears and looked like the moon in the noon-day sky, as, torn from its natural setting by the side of Rama, it was forced into the unwelcome vicinity of Ravana. Seeta of golden hue, in the grasp of Ravana, dark and huge, resembled a golden thread passing through blue stones, or a stream of lightning flashing through clouds, or a chain of gold round the loins of an elephant. The chime of her ornaments on his body gave one the idea of the rumbling of rain-charged clouds. The flowers and garlands in her hair strewed their path; and as the strong wind from his rapid course through the air drew them after him, he looked like the mount Meru hung with garlands of bright stars. The anklets and chains on her feet and rings curiously wrought with gold and gems slipped away and fell to the earth with a melodious tinkle like streaks of lightning. As he raced through the skies

with Seeta who shone in her unparalleled lustre, he
75 appeared like an *ulka* (*Vide* notes on Ayodhyakanda
page 58) that is a harbinger of boundless misery and
danger to kings. As her ornaments fell upon the
earth, bright as sparks of fire, it gave the appearance
of stars falling from the sky with a terrible roar.
80 As the garland, bright as the moon, that she wore round
her shoulders slipped and fell on the ground, it looked
as if the Ganga descended to the earth from the
celestial regions. The fierce gale that sprung from the
velocity of Ravana's passage through the sky beat down
85 tall stately trees, shook their boughs, while the birds
thereon screamed in affright; it seemed as if they
sought to infuse courage into her heart, and bade her
'Fear not', shaking their heads and waving their
arms emphatically. The lotuses in the ponds were
90 lustreless; fish and waterfowl were awed into silence,
as if they were beside themselves with grief at the
misfortune that befell their beloved friend and play-
mate. Lions, tigers, deer, birds and other denizens
of the forest rushed from all quarters, filled with
95 mad fury at the sight of Ravana's shadow upon the
earth and sprang after him with deadly intent. The
lofty mountains from whose peaks the torrents raced
down in their headlong course, looked as if they raised
streaming eyes and frantic hands to heaven to punish
100 the impious Ravana who was carrying away Seeta by
force. The sun paled and dulled as if the outrage was
too great a shock for him. Beasts and birds wept
and sorrowed in groups, saying to themselves "Dharma,
truth, justice and compassion have taken leave of this
105 world of ours; else, Ravana would not have dared to lay
hands on Seeta, the daughter of Janaka and the beloved
wife of Rama." The fawns screamed piteously in their

fear and shed helpless tears at the sight of Seeta. The very Spirits of the mountains, rivers and forests quaked in affright when they beheld Seeta fill the air 110 with her wails and cries. But, Ravana heeded it not in the least as, with dishevelled hair and disfigured tilaka, she glanced everywhere and cried "Ah, Rama! Ah, Lakshmana!" He bore her on as if he was bent on having dread Fate as his guest. 115

Then, she despired of seeing Rama, Lakshmana or any kin or friend; pale with fear, she fell a prey to hopelessness and despondency.

CHAPTER LIII.

SEETA REBUKES RAVANA.

HER eyes red with anger and weeping, whelmed with grief and trembling with fear, she turned upon Ravana and cried, "Base wretch, who could 5 stoop to run away with me in stealth, lying in wait for chance of Rama and Lakshmana absenting themselves from the house! are you dead to all sense of shame? Full well do I see that the golden deer was but a creation of your magic to lure away the princes; 10 you would abduct me and yet, dared not show yourself before them. Jatayu, the old and beloved friend of my father-in-law, did his very best to save me from you and was slain in the attempt. You did well to brag before me of your titles, lineage, ancestry 15 and fame; you make a nice hero that defeated in battle dire a weak defenceless girl! Verily, your valour and prowess are beyond description. It is most wonderful to see that shame touches not your heart in the least to think that you have stolen the wife of another when he 20

was not there to punish you. You call yourself a warrior of matchless strength and might and yet, would stoop to this low and wretched trade ; the world will, for all time, brand you as a monster of cruelty, a miserable
 25 sinner, a low sneaky thief. What has become of your boast, your brag of tearing up the earth, drinking the oceans dry and staying the sun and the moon in their course ? Fie upon you ! call yourself a *thing* ! Words fail me to describe your heinous act that
 30 has blackened for all time the fair fame of the rakshasa race. Fie, fie ! what can one do with a fellow to whom mad terror lends wings ? Stay for a while and count the few remaining moments of your wicked existence. Your kin, your armies and yourself are sure
 35 to be annihilated the moment you come under the glances of Rama and Lakshmana. Dare you stand before the arrows of the heroic princes ? Do you believe that little birds can fall into the heart of a roaring forest conflagration and escape with life ? Have nothing to
 40 do with me ; take me back if life and happiness are dear to you. Think well and clearly and you will not fail to see that I speak in your best interests. Should you persist in your mad attempt, my husband and his brother will not fail to offer you a victim to their wrath.
 45 Low thief ! what infinite trouble do you undergo and all to abduct me ! But, rest assured you do but labour in vain. Fool ! see you not that I have no life apart from Raghunatha, endowed with the beauty and might of the very gods ? Would I place myself in the
 50 power of their mortal foe ? You are blind to what conduces to your fame and happiness, even as a man with the seal of Death on his brow who feeds upon unhealthy and dangerous substances. Those that draw near the mansions of Death cultivate a causeless

hate of every thing good and beneficial to themselves. 55
 One can see with half an eye that the noose of Death tightens round your neck, when your heart shuns not the danger that stares you in the face. I am sure you behold trees of gold, the terrible Vaitarani with its roaring torrents of blood and the dreadful forest of 60 Asipatra. Do you catch a view of the salmali that glows with a white heat, covered with emerald leaves, golden flowers and sharp thorns of iron? Do you deceive yourself with the thought—‘the Present and the joys it yields are enough for me; the Future I leave 65 to take care of itself’? Just tell me how long you hope to live, having laboured so hard to earn the enmity and anger of the noble-souled Raghava. Have you heard of any one drink to the dregs a cup of deadly poison and long survive it? My husband has 70 bound you tight with the noose of Death; and there is none who can free you from it. Where would you flee from his wrath? Saw you not how Khara, Dooshana and the fourteen thousand rakshasas of Janasthana fell a prey to his arrows? How long was he at it? How 75 was he mounted? Was there Lakshmana to aid him? Then, would he fail to offer *your* life as a sacrifice to his sharp shafts, seeing that you have dared to lay violent hands on the wedded wife of that hero, the very life of his life as it were? Are there any weapons, 80 any astras, human, divine or infernal, that he is not master of? Verily, infinite and unfathomable is his might.”

But, Seeta’s words of winged flame and piteous appeal fell upon the deaf ears of that sinful wretch, as 85 if she spoke to roaring winds and waves. Her prayers would have convinced and melted a soul of adamant, yet they failed to touch the the black heart of Ravana.

Trembling with fear, Seeta was in the grip of unspeak-
 90 able woe at seeing that all her efforts to escape from
 his hands were fruitless ; but, Ravana heeded it not in
 the least and bore her on.

CHAPTER LIV.

SEETA'S PRISON-HOUSE.

AS she was being carried away helpless by Ravana,
 she saw five mighty monkeys sitting together
 5 on the top of a mountain and flung in their
 midst some of her ornaments wrapped in a piece of cloth;
 for, said she to herself, "Who knows but these
 might acquaint Rama with the misfortune that has
 befallen me?" Ravana noticed it not in his anxiety
 10 and preoccupation. The tawny-eyed monkey-heroes
 could not take their looks off Seeta as she wailed and
 wept, the hot tears raining from her large lovely eyes.
 Lake Pampa came into view; and Ravana, who, till then,
 cast anxious glances in the direction of Rama's cottage
 15 lest he should be pursued, took heart and rejoiced to see
 that the princes were nowhere in sight ; he directed his
 course to Lanka with redoubled speed. He forced his
 Fate in the guise of Seeta to follow him to his
 house, a reluctant guest, even as a fool who would
 20 wear a serpent of cruel venom as a belt. Straight as
 the arrow shot from the bow of a redoubtable archer,
 he crossed forests, rivers, lakes and mountains with
 the speed of thought and reached the shores of the
 ocean teeming with crocodiles, whales and other
 25 marine monsters. The Father of waters silenced his
 rebellious waves in fear as he set his eyes on
 Ravana who drew near with Seeta in his arms.

Serpents and fish vanished from view. From on high came the warning cries and curses of siddhas, charanas and other celestial hosts "Ravana! you 30 are almost at the gates of Death." Meanwhile, Dasagreeva entered his capital and with him Seeta, his Doom incarnate. He passed through spacious streets and vast blocks of dwellings and reached the women's apartments. He placed Seeta in his own rooms 35 as she swooned away with fear and grief, even as Maya, of yore, placed Swayamprabha, the apsaras, in the cave marvellously fashioned by his magic. Then, he sent for the pisacha-faced rakshasis and said "I entrust this lady to your charge. No one, 40 man or woman, should so much as catch a glimpse of of her without my express orders. See to it that you show her every respect, reverence and honor that I receive at your hands. Gold, gems, garments, ornaments and whatever her heart might desire should 45 be placed before her with the speed of thought. Should you chance to earn her displeasure consciously or otherwise, that moment is your last."

He came out of his harem and stood pondering over what remained to be done, when he saw before him 50 eight mighty rakshasas, valiant, cruel and utterly fearless. Blind in his conceit at the boons he had received from Brahma, he praised their strength and said, "Arm yourselves and proceed straight to Janas-thana. You know that Khara and Dooshana were 55 stationed there. Rama slew them in battle and their countless warriors. Boundless rage fills my heart to think of it; I am ever on the watch for a chance to avenge their deaths; my soul knows no rest, my eyes no sleep until I slay them in battle. Those sinful 60 wretches shall die at my hands, those murderers of

Khara and [Dooshana; and I will rejoice even as a beggar who lights upon a priceless treasure. Station yourselves there. Nay, fear not; you are more than
 65 a match for him in strength and skill. Send me constant reports of him. Be on your guard; be not deceived; ever wait for a chance to kill him. Be not disheartened at the sad fate of Khara and Dooshana. I have had occasion to test your strength, bravery
 70 and valour in numerous battles; so, I send you on this mission, confident in your powers to accomplish it." The eight rakshasas could not contain themselves for joy at this unusual praise from their monarch and proceeded straight to Janasthana, having rendered
 75 themselves invisible by the power of their magic.

Thus, Ravana carried away Janaki by stealth from Rama's hermitage; and, infatuated with desire, he earned the enmity of Raghava; yet, his heart knew not care and rejoiced.

CHAPTER LV.

RAVANA ENTREATS SEETA.

RAVANA dismissed the rakshasas and imagined that he had realised all his hopes and desires; for, was he not small of heart? Then, his passion for Seeta came over him; he could think of nothing else and rapidly took his way to the asoka grove to see her. There she was, seated in the midst of the rakshasis, like a boat sinking under the merciless
 10 buffetting of the waves and the winds; her face was wan with grief and soiled with the ceaseless flow of tears. Like a doe that had strayed from its herd and was encompassed by the hounds, Seeta felt herself

powerless in the grasp of those rakshasis and never took her eyes off the ground, sunk in despair and 15 thought. "Fool that I was!" exclaimed Ravana to himself "I described in glowing terms to her at Janasthana my boundless wealth, power and achievements. She would have been mine by this time had I given her a chance to see them for herself". He 20 forced her to go with him through his palaces, mansions, treasure-chambers and pleasure gardens and failed not to draw her attention to the wonders therein. Domes, terraces, balconies and turrets were cunningly fashioned everywhere; lovely women glided 25 through them like flashes of lightning. Rare and wonderful birds sang and warbled melodiously from beautiful cages. Pillars of gold, silver and crystal met the eye on all sides flashing with precious stones. The golden stairs, wondrously wrought, gave forth the 30 sounds of huge war-drums as Ravana ascended them along with Seeta. Windows made of gold, silver and ivory were shaded with gold nets. The floors were covered with curious and lovely mosaics of gems. Pools and ponds were carpeted with rare flowers and 35 lined with charming trees of infinite variety. Seeta had no eyes for anything, but was sunk in the depths of woe; yet, Ravana failed not to point out to her everything rare and beautiful in his mansions and fondly deceived himself with the hope that she would be dazzled 40 thereby into favouring his suit. "I am the absolute lord and master of thirty-two crores of rakshasas, of matchless strength, valour and ferocity (of course, I take no account of the old men, boys and women). Thousands of servants are deputed to each department 45 of work. This kingdom and all concerns of it are yours, to do with them as you will; nay, my life is at

your disposal. Are you not dearer to me than the
 breath of my nostrils? Lord it over the countless
 50 women I have brought here from the worlds above and
 below; but take me as your husband. Let no other foolish
 thought sway you otherwise. Have pity on me whom
 your beauty has enslaved quite and lend a favourable
 ear to my suit. Countless rakshasas guard day and
 55 night this Lanka of mine that extends over many
 a yojana. Devas and asuras banded together dare not
 approach it. Gods, yakshas, gandharvas and pannagas,
 nay, all created beings in the numerous worlds would
 not so much as dream of facing me in battle. How could
 60 Rama stead you, a base mortal, driven from his
 kingdom, deprived of his lustre and length of years and
 forced to lead a helpless and miserable life as a hermit?
 Take me to your heart; for, I am a meet husband for
 you every way. Youth is as transient as the
 65 flash of lightning; so, make the best of it here in my
 company. Put away from you all thoughts, all hopes
 of ever beholding your Rama again. He dare not even
 dream of coming here. Would he tie with ropes the
 rushing storm? Would he grasp the blazing flames?
 70 Find me any one in the myriad worlds who could take
 you from my possession. This boundless empire of
 mine is yours; myself, the gods and all created beings
 are yours to command. Enthroned yourself as my
 queen and take your fill of every joy and pleasure that
 75 your heart can desire. Your recent exile was but
 the result of your past sins; you have seen the last of
 it. Now follows the reward of your good deeds in the
 past and, in consequence, you reign with me over this
 kingdom of Lanka. Let us enjoy these garlands, per-
 80 fumes, ornaments and every delight that fancy
 could conceive. It was but a moment's work for me to

defeat my brother Kubera and deprive him of the vimana Pushpaka. Spacious as thought, it is ever fitted up with every convenience and comfort and shines like the noon-day sun ; let us range the worlds in it. 85 Never was your countenance, lovely as the lotus, formed to be touched with grief." At these insensate ravings of Ravana, Seeta covered her face with her garment and shed hot and blinding tears.

But, the rakshasa heeded it not. He addressed 90 himself to her who, weighed down with grief and anxiety, was absorbed in the thoughts of her husband and said, "Is it shame that draws you back that it is adharma to abandon the husband whose hand you clasped in holy wedlock ? Do you not see that the 95 Fates have ordained our union ? The rishis accord their sanction to it ; it is not adharma. Behold ; your feet shall be upon my head ; turn your heart to me. I am your veriest slave ; I am yours body and soul. Never till now has Ravana been known to utter a word of 100 request to any woman, nor bend his haughty head before her. It is an unaccountable wonder to me how these undignified and incoherent words fell from my lips, through overmastering passion." Blinded by his approaching fate, he decided within himself that he 105 had won the heart of Janaki.

CHAPTER LVI.

SEETA REBUKES RAVANA.

BUT, Seeta was not in the least cowed or disheartened by those defiant and haughty words of Ravana. It was all improper for a faithful wife 5 to hold direct talk with a stranger ; so, she threw

a blade of grass between them and gave free expression to the grief and sorrow that filled her heart. "There reigned a king named Dasaratha, truthful of speech and loyal to dharma. He had a son Rama so named, whose fame and glory illuminates the infinite worlds. With large and lovely eyes, long arms that reach below the knees and leonine chest and shoulders, he shines in unparalleled lustre. The soul of virtue, he is the lord of the myriad worlds; and him do I call my husband. With such noble and stainless connections, with a husband who has no peer in the whole creation, would I stoop to a low and unrighteous act? He and his brother Lakshmana have taken birth in the line of Ikshwaku but to slay you; so, I have not the slightest fear of you. 'Why does he not bestir himself now?' Had you but committed this outrage in his presence, you would have taken your place by the side of Khara, a rotting carcass. Your terrible rakshasas of matchless strength will tremble at the sight of him, as serpents quake before Garuda. His sharp, gold-banded shafts will pierce your vitals, as the roaring flood topples down the banks of the Ganga. You have escaped death till now at the hands of gods and asuras; but, you will not survive to tell the tale of your enmity to *Rama*. Have you ever known an animal tied to the sacrificial post go back to its fellows? Rama has might enough to be your Fate. He has but to dart a glance of anger at you and you are a heap of ashes. He would scatter the sun and the moon upon the earth or annihilate them if he is so minded; he would turn the fathomless oceans into boundless deserts of burning sand; would he fail to deliver *Seeta* from your impious hands? The shadow of oblivion is upon your life, wealth, power, might and valour; Lanka is helpless, masterless and widowed, all through you.

“You thought lightly of carrying me away from my forest home where I was leading a happy life with my husband; did you count upon this heinous sin to gather you a harvest of happiness and good? ‘What harm can he do me, the coward who fled to the forests 45 before the wrath of a woman?’ Is it not plain to you that his fearless abode all alone in this forest of Dandaka, the haunt of fierce beasts and fiercer rakshasa, argues superhuman strength, might and courage in him? His arrowy shower will destroy 50 your pride, strength, prowess, conceit and wickedness. Creatures behave strangely and perversely when they near the mansions of Death. The moment has come for the total destruction of yourself and your rakshasas; hence, you were impelled to lay violent hands 55 upon me. Can a chandala hope to approach a sacrificial altar adorned with *kusa* grass and sacred utensils, when the fire blazes higher and higher with each repeated libation? That sacrificial hall is Rama, whose soul is ever loyal to dharma; that 60 sacred fire am I, adorned with his love and guarded by his valour; can you, the chandala, hope to approach me? The she-swan that disports herself gaily with her mate in the lotus-pools does not demean herself by wasting a glance at the water-fowl in the reeds. I 65 care not whether you fetter this senseless lump of clay, my body, or hack it to pieces, or tear it with your teeth; I am not much inclined to preserve it or the life that courses through it. But, never will I soil myself with eternal infamy.” Sharply did she speak and 70 turn away from him in silent contempt.

Ravana was beside himself with anger thereat and, more to frighten her, cried out, “Seeta! here is my last word. This day twelve months you come to my side

75 as my wife ; else, my cooks cut you into mine-meat for my breakfast." He turned to the rakshasis and said, "Batter down her pride and obstinacy ; turn her heart to me. Guard her most carefully in this asoka grove and none shall know of it. I must have my way with
80 her ; bring it about as hunters tame wild elephants by alternate gentleness and force." He strode forth from the place, the earth quaking in affright at his anger. Hideous rakshasis led her away to the asoka grove ; fruits, flowers and intoxicated birds adorned it at all
85 seasons ; but, like a doe in the power of tigresses or a fawn in the toils of the hunter, Seeta was overwhelmed with fear and grief at the sight of the monstrous guards about her and could do nothing but allow her thoughts to gravitate ever towards Rama, her beloved
90 and the god of her heart.

CHAPTER LVII.

LAKSHMANA MEETS RAMA.

MAREECHA, the master of illusions, having been slain in the guise of the wonderful deer, Rama sped on to meet Seeta, when a jackal howled behind him fearfully. His hair stood on end with fear thereat. "Alas ! it bodes ill for Seeta ; would that she escaped death from the rakshasas ! It was not for nothing that Mareecha called out to her and Laksh-
10 mana in my voice. He will leave her behind and hasten to my side. She will despatch him to me ; then, the field will be open for the rakshasas to fall upon her ; alas ! it was nicely planned. Was it not for this that Mareecha came here as the golden deer,
15 enticed me far away from the cottage and cried "Ha,

Lakshmana! Ha, Seeta!" when my shaft clove his heart? Would that they were safe in this boundless forest! The rakshasas are ever on the watch to work me evil ever since I slew them at Janasthana. Bad omens of terrible import grow around me." His heart 20 forebode some vague danger; the howl of the jackal and his being lured away by Mareecha far from the cottage deepened his conviction. Birds and beasts passed to the right of him with dreadful cries. He ran towards the cottage with greater speed when he saw 25

•Lakshmana advance towards him with a dull and listless look. Rama came up to him and, noticing that his face was wan and heavy with grief, rebuked him sharply for leaving Seeta alone in the rakshasa-haunted forests. Bursting with anger and grief, he caught his 30 brother by his right hand and cried, "You Lakshmana! you have come here and left Seeta all alone and unguarded! What fool's work is this? Would that I see her safe and sound! No doubt of it, she has fallen a helpless prey to wild beasts or wilder rakshasas. Is it 35 for this we brought with us the daughter of king Janaka, the saint? Fie upon our arms and valour that cannot guard her from danger! We but disgrace the weapons we wear, who are powerless to protect a woman that confidingly followed us here. My fear is 40 borne out by the numerous evil omens about me. Shall we see her safe and living? Are we not bound to render her back scatheless to her father, king Janaka? Crows, jackals, deer and other birds and beasts cry at the sun. Shall I find her alive, my Janaki? Maree- 45 cha, the wicked wretch, came to us as a deer and drew me far away from the cottage; him I slew after a long and arduous chase; but, at the last moment, he resumed his own form and deceived you and Seeta. Some

50 vague fear and sorrow weighs down my heart; my
 right eye throbs; I shall not find Seeta in our asrama.
 Has some one carried her away? Is she dead? Or, is
 she dragged along unwillingly by some wretch? I tell
 you, we shall not set our eyes upon Seeta in that
 55 cottage.”

CHAPTER LVIII.

RAMA LAMENTS.

“**L**AKSHMANA! where have you left Seeta, who
 was so obstinately bent upon coming with
 me when I started for the forests? Where
 is Janaki who shared all my sorrows and
 privations and would not abandon me as I fled to the
 woods, poor, helpless and bereft of my kingdom? Where
 is my Seeta, lovely as the maids of heaven and dearer to
 10 me than life? Reft of her, can I hope to live for an
 hour? The lordship over the myriad worlds is as nothing
 to me if that princess of golden complexion is not
 by my side. Shall we see Janaki alive, the beloved
 companion of my heart? Shall I fulfil my promise to my
 15 father to spend fourteen years in the forests? I die of
 grief at being robbed of Seeta and you go back to
 Ayodhya; I hope *that* would gladden the heart of
 Kaikeyi, the saintly lady. I hope *that* would crown her
 hopes and schemes; her son on the throne, she would be
 20 blinded with pride and conceit and force Kausalya, my
 mother, to render her obedience and service. Is it not
 enough that she has lost her husband and son, but she
 must become the slave of a co-wife? I go to the asrama
 if Janaki is alive; else, I kill myself. If Seeta does not
 25 advance to meet me with a smile on her lips, I kill

myself. Lakshmana ! is she alive or no ? Tell me that. Or, have the rakshasas killed her after you came away ? Delicately nurtured, a stranger to sorrow and adversity, a very girl, where does she pine and languish, torn away from my side ? I think you too were afraid to hear that 30 wicked rakshasa cry out cunningly ‘ Ha, Lakshmana ! ’. Seeta mistook it for my voice and, afraid for my safety, despatched you here after me ; that is why you have sped here so quickly. However, it is a great misfortune to have left her behind all alone in that forest. Ever 35 Since the destruction of Khara and Dooshana, the rakshasas are mad with impotent fury and lie in wait for a chance to work evil upon me ; now, we have nicely played into their hands. Doubtless those cannibals would by now have torn her to pieces. Alas ! I see no 40 way out of it. Perhaps this is the harvest of my past deeds.” • Thus raving and lamenting after Seeta, Rama ran towards Janasthana followed by his brother.

Venting his anger at Lakshmana, tired out with the long chase and the fast run back, faint with hunger and 45 thirst, Rama approached the cottage heaving hot sighs ; but, there was no Seeta to welcome him. The place recalled to him the pleasant memories of the happy hours he spent with her there and filled him with unspeakable anguish. 50

CHAPTER LIX.

RAMA LAMENTS (*continued*).

RAMA met Lakshmana half way as he was hastening from the cottage and, noticing his gloomy looks, exclaimed “ I left Janaki at the asrama, 5 relying upon your promise to guard her ; now, why have

you come here, deserting your charge? I am sure that your looks forebode some great danger to Seeta. My right eye, arm and chest throbbed to behold you hasten towards me all alone."

The sharp rebuke of Rama pierced, like *narachas*, the heart of Lakshmana already sore with the cruel words of Seeta. But, he kept back his grief and anger and replied "Brother! not wantonly, not willingly, not causelessly did I come here and leave Seeta behind me. Her taunts of unspeakable cruelty and malice drove me here; else, would I ever slight your commands? There fell upon our ears a cry for help in your voice 'Ha, Lakshmana! Ha, Seeta!' Sore afraid of your safety, she burst into tears, and, her love towards you blinding her to all danger to herself, cried 'Lakshmana! fly on the wings of speed to your brother's help. Stay not here.' Ordered thus again and again, I heeded it not (for, full well do I know your might) and replied 'I see none, rakshasas or others, in all the worlds from whom Raghuveera has anything to fear. This is not his voice, but of some other who wants to deceive us. Grieve not; Raghunatha, under the shadow of whose arm rest in safety and happiness the infinite worlds and their creation, would he demean himself by calling upon a woman like yourself and an insignificant object in every way like myself to save him? It is all unworthy of that best of men, of that prince of heroes. It is some rakshasa who, for some unknown purpose, has assumed his tones to cry 'Help, help.' Further, I am sure it is not Rama's voice that uttered the words 'Lakshmana! help me.' There is a world of difference between them. I pray you be not anxious; for, you are not like other women. Why grieve? Do not send me away. I tell you there never was nor will be any

one in all the worlds who could face Rama in battle. The hosts of heaven in battle arrayed dare not lift their eyes to him.' This and much more did I urge upon her. But, dazed with grief, she heard me not; she burst into a storm of tears and said to me, whose heart 45 is ever pure and loyal 'Wretch! you have set your foul heart upon me and lie in wait for a chance when my husband will lie helpless in the grip of some mortal danger. Really, boundless is your devotion and loyalty to him, that you followed him to the dark woods. 50 Nothing betrays it more plainly than your utter absence of anxiety when he is in deadly peril. Would you seek to deceive me too and lull my suspicions? You are the relentless enemy of Rama; you ever pray for a chance to kill him; the prince of hypocrites, you 55 have followed him but to possess me. Else, would you seek to assure me of his safety when I know that he lies helpless under the shadow of Death?' These words of diabolical malice and cruelty, all undeserved, all strange, roused my anger; my eyes grew red and my 60 lips quivered with suppressed rage. I could not stay there a moment after it and came away to you."

But, Rama, his mind confused with grief at having lost Janaki, heard him not and kept on saying, "Whatever it may be, it was utterly foolish of you to 65 leave her behind helpless; you have opened the door wide for a great danger. Know you not that the rakshasas are but chaff before me? You are all to blame for coming away; you had not the courage to brush away the foolish words and sharp of a woman 70 distracted with grief. They are not generally remarkable for their sense or intelligence; and Seeta's anger made her unjust and foolish; now, no man of any discernment would pay the slightest heed to it. You

75 did wrong to lose your temper and transgress my orders. She deserves your respect ; she is a woman and confused with grief and anger. My commands are more imperative in your eyes than any senseless ravings of hers. Even if you found it impossible to bear her
80 insults, you should have concealed yourself somewhere near and guarded over her safety. Mareecha, that drew me far away from the cottage as a golden deer, lost his life to a light arrow of mine. He resumed his rakshasa form at the last moment and cried piteously in my voice
85 ‘ Ha Lakshmana ! Ha Seeta ! help me ’. That made you come here and leave Janaki alone.”

CHAPTER LX.

RAMA LAMENTS. (*Continued*)

THE lower lid of his left eye twitched, his feet stumbled and his body shivered as Rama returned to the cottage in hot haste. Such repeated warnings filled him with fear of Seeta’s safety and he entered the cottage all eager to behold her. He stood dazed for a while to find it empty ; then, he shook his limbs as if preparing himself for a spring and
10 searched anxiously in every place she used to haunt. Like lotus-pools in winter, reft of flowers and their glory, the leafy abode was dark and dreary without Janaki. The low hum of bees on the trees around with their faded leaves and flowers seemed as if they sobbed in grief at
15 the loss of Seeta. Birds and beasts were sad and listless. The guardian Spirits of the woods fled away in affright. Deerskins, sacred grass and seats lay scattered in confusion in the asrama. It wore a gloomy and empty look that caused Rama to burst again into tears and lament.

“ Who has made away with Seeta ? Who has killed 20
 her ? Where has she lost her way ? Have the rakshasas
 eaten her up ? Or does she hide herself somewhere in
 sport ? Or, does she lie concealed in fear in the dark
 woods ? Has she gone out to gather flowers or fruits ? Or,
 has she walked to the lotus-pool to take a bath ? Has 25
 she gone to the Godaveri ? ” Seek her ever so carefully,
 he failed to come upon her. Red-eyed with grief, he
 ran like one demented, from tree to tree, from hill to hill
 and from stream to stream. “ You neepa ! Seeta loved
 you dearly ; did you see her ? You would not reply ? You 30
 bilwa ! your tender shoots recall to me the lovely com-
 plexion of Seeta ; she is dressed in a silk garment ; her
 breasts are large, round and firm like your fruits.
 Did you see your playmate anywhere ? You too would
 not reply me ? You arjuna ! is she alive or not, Janaki, 35
 who loved you so fondly ? You too would not reply me ?
 You kakubha ! did you see my beloved with thighs like
 unto you ? You too would not reply me ? You tilaka !
 you are about to give me some glad news of her, since
 you are gay with shoots, flowers and the sweet hum of 40
 bees. Know you where she has gone ? You too would
 not reply me ? You asoka ! rightly have you been named
 so, since you remove the grief (soka) of those that be-
 hold you. Deserve your title by guiding me to where my
 beloved is and chasing away the poignant grief that 45
 tears at my heart. You too would not reply me ? You,
 palm ! where is my beloved whose breasts resemble
 your fruits ? My misery does not touch your heart ? You
 too would not reply me ? You jambu ! where is my
 Seeta whose body shines with the gloss and silkiness 50
 of your fruits ? You know not ? You karnikara ! my
 heart rejoices to see you covered with flowers. Seeta
 delights to gather them. Did you happen to see her

anywhere ?” Thus interrogating the mango, neepa, sala,
 55 jack, kuravaka, pomegranate, asana and other trees, the
 jasmine, madhavi, champaka, ketaki and other flowering
 plants, he ran about the forest as one bereft of his
 senses.

Their silence argued their indifference to him ; he
 60 hoped better from the beasts and cried, “ You deer ! did
 you see Seeta with eyes like unto yours ? You would
 not tell me ? You elephant ! you might have come across
 Seeta whose thighs resemble your trunk ; where has
 she gone ? You too would not reply me ? You tiger ! you
 65 elephant and deer are silent through fear of some one ;
 but, you are brave and fear none ; speak out. Did you
 see Seeta whose gait is charming like yours ?

“ None of you mean to reply. Seeta ! I have found
 you out. Why do you run away ? Can you escape
 70 me ? Why do you reply not, though I entreat you so
 piteously ? Stay, stay. Have you no pity for me ?
 You are not used to carry a jest too far ; then, why
 so indifferent to me ? Alas ! is she not perhaps in the
 land of the living ? Else, she would not bear to see
 75 me suffer so ; then, who has tortured her to death ?
 Have the rakshasas, that delight in human flesh, fallen
 upon her in my absence and cut her to pieces ? I
 guess her face, that rivals the full moon in its charming
 teeth, lips, nose and earrings, would by this time be
 80 dull and lustreless. Have the rakshasas fallen upon
 her when she was weeping with fear in my absence
 and bit into her neck, the garlands and other orna-
 ments on which but served as a foil to the champaka hue
 thereof, and drank deep of her blood ? Have the cruel
 85 monsters torn to pieces her arms, soft as tender shoots
 and adorned with bracelets and chains ? Who knows
 how she writhed and cried under the agony ? As a

caravan passing through a dark forest leaves a woman that came with them to the mercy of fierce beasts of prey, I abandoned you a helpless victim to the 90 rakshasas, though you have countless kin and friends. Lakshmana! sharp is your intelligence. Did you happen to see her anywhere? Ah, Seeta! where are you?" Thus raving like a lunatic, he ran from one forest to another. Now, he raced at full speed and 95 tottered; now, he stood speechless before some creepers as if they were Seeta; anon, he wandered aimlessly like one mad, seeking her in every nook and corner.

So, through groves and hill slopes he roamed, but never came upon his beloved; yet, he would not 100 despair and set about to seek her afresh,

CHAPTER LXI.

RAMA LAMENTS (*continued*.)

SEETA was not to be found in the cottage or around it; seats and other articles of furniture were scattered around the room. Rama searched in vain through the surrounding forests; then, he 5 threw up his hands and cried "Lakshmana! where is Seeta? Where could she have gone? Who might have made away with her? Has some one eaten her up? Seeta! if you hide among the trees in sport, 10 enough of it. Come away; see you not how I suffer? Your favourite playmates, the fawns, weep hot tears at finding you not. Lakshmana! I will not survive her separation. Alas! if I go to the other side of death, I am sure to meet my father and he would 15 naturally say 'I sent you to the forests relying upon your promise to spend fourteen years of exile there.

Why have you come away before your time? Bad, unprincipled, untruthful! fie, fie upon you!’ Then, how
 20 shall reply him? As the Goddess of fortune abandons the traitor to truth, where have you fled away from me, who am miserable, disappointed, senseless and tottering under the strokes of grief? Is it worthy of a woman, the best and noblest of her sex? Of a truth, I
 25 die if I see you not.” But, his laments and wails failed to bring her forth.

At the sight of Rama, his senses all adrift like a lordly elephant sunk deep in the mire, Lakshmana, who ever had at heart his brother’s interests, replied, “Grieve
 30 not, noble one! Let us search together; there are innumerable caves in this forest. Janaki takes great delight in wandering through these woods; so, it is likely that she spends her time somewhere in sport; or, she might have gone to some lotus-pool to have a bath;
 35 or, she might have hid herself somewhere in jest, as she used to do; or, she might have done so to give us a fright; or, she might have come upon some lurking places unknown to us and relies upon us to hunt her up. It could never happen to you to lose your wife.
 40 We shall make it a point to go over every foot of this forest and find her out. Let this not cause you any anxiety.”


Strengthened and consoled somewhat by the words of Lakshmana, who spoke out of supreme love and
 45 friendship, Rama began to seek Seeta afresh. “Perhaps she might have gone here to gather flowers;” and he searched the forests. “Or, she might have gone up here to collect curious ores”; and he searched the hills and the mountains. “Or, she might have gone this way, as
 50 she delights in seeing the water-fowl line the sandy shallows;” and he searched the rivers and streams.

Seeta took a pleasure in playing in the water of the lotus-covered pools; and he searched among them. Thus, he tired himself in fruitless search among caves, hill-slopes, peaks and valleys. 55

Then he turned to Lakshmana and cried, "Alas! we have searched everywhere, but have failed to find her. What shall I do?" The sight of his redoubtable brother weeping in the Dandaka forests like a forlorn outcast, quite overcame Lakshmana; and, out of a 60 loving heart he sought to console him. "I am sure that you will ere long come upon the wicked wretch who has carried away Seeta and he shall render her back to you and his life along with it as a penalty, even as Maha-vishnu of yore bound Bali and recovered the three 65 worlds from him." Yet, Rama would not be consoled. "Most carefully did I search this forest with its mountains, streams, ponds and caves, but have failed to find Seeta. Alas! what shall I do?" He swooned away with grief for the space of an hour, his hot breath and 70 sighs being the only sign of life coursing through his wan frame. Next, he came back to his senses and cried "Ah, my love!" again and again and burst into a flood of tears. Then, Lakshmana, who loved him most fondly and was conversant with every shade of dharma, 75 consoled him in many a wise over his joined palms. But, Rama heeded it not in the least and never ceased his wails and laments.

CHAPTER LXII.

RAMA LAMENTS (*continued*).


 AMA was the soul of virtue; his desires never went counter to it; bereft of Seeta, he threw up his hands and, with sreaming eyes and a darkening heart, fancied that his beloved was with him and resumed his plaintive laments, in the madness of passion. Dare we hope to give even a faint idea of it? "You are very fond of asoka flowers and hide yourself behind its branches; but what avails it, for, I have found you out? You gain nothing more by it than sharpening my grief. Why do you hide your delicate thighs with young plantains? Do you think I cannot find you out? I have caught you at last, Why do you conceal yourself in sport amidst groves of karnikara? You carry a jest too far; for I am too weak and dispirited to bear this shock. Yet, this was very dear to me a while ago; but now my heart revolts at it. Again, this holy asrama is no place for it. I know well you are overfond of jest and pleasantry. Large-eyed one! come back at once. This cottage is dark and gloomy without you. Lakshmana! I have no doubt that the rakshasas have slain or eaten her up; for she would not bear to see me suffer and lament so. These herds of deer shed piteous tears as if conveying to me the news of her death at the hands of the rakshasas. Best and noblest of wives! Matchless of beauty! Crowned with every perfection! where have you gone? Alas! your terrible fate was correctly foreseen by Kaikeyi. I left Ayodhya *with* Seeta: how shall I enter my palace *without* her? The finger of scorn would point at me as an impotent and

merciless wretch. It is only after Seeta has left my side that I see how slight a hold I have upon life. When, at the end of my exile, I return to Ayodhya and 35 meet king Janaka, he would naturally ask ‘Rama! is it all well with my child Seeta?’ Then, how shall I dare look him in the face? His whole soul is bound up in her; should he see me return without her, he would swoon away with grief. But, should I at all 40 return to Ayodhya? What have I to do with it, though Bharata reign there ever so gloriously? The worlds of bliss are but a dreary void to me without Seeta. Lakshmana! leave me here in these woods and go back to Ayodhya. Could I survive her? Embrace 45 Bharata for me and convey him my wish that he should rule over this broad earth. Salute Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi and obey them in all things; for they should be taken care of at all risks. I lay this upon you. Relate to my mothers how we lost Seeta 50 and how I died of grief thereat.” And as Raghava ran about the woods vacant of Seeta, moaning and weeping piteously, Lakshmana was filled with fear; his face faded and his heart was whelmed with despair.

CHAPTER LXIII.

RAMA LAMENTS (*continued*.)

THE loss of Seeta and his constant thoughts of her heightened his passion and grief; Lakshmana suffered no less to see his brother so. This re- 5 doubled his grief and, with streaming eyes and hot sighs, he gave way to despair and began to bewail her afresh. “The worlds above and below hold not a sinner like myself. The never-ceasing billows of grief shatter

10 my heart and intellect. My sins must have been
 terrible and past count in former births; else, this
 eternal round of sorrow can never fall to the lot of
 man. The loss of my throne, the separation from my
 mother and kin and the death of my father did but go
 15 to increase the torrent of my grief; yet, hard toil
 and fatigue smothered them since I came to these
 lonely woods. Now, the loss of my beloved has
 fanned it into a blazing fire and I burn horribly.
 Seeta, my heart-love, is but a girl, very timid and
 20 generous to a fault; how she would have cried out
 from fear and called upon me as the rakshasas bore her
 through the air! Her lovely breasts that used to be
 covered with the red sandal paste *lohita* would now
 be smeared with gore and repulsive to the eye. I
 25 cannot bear to think of the beauty of her face, set in
 its dark lustrous curls and her sweet, gentle and soul-
 stirring voice. Like the moon in the cruel grip of
 Rahu, how that face would have suffered in the cruel
 grasp of the rakshasas! Priceless garlands and neck-
 30 lets shine round the neck of Seeta whose heart is
 bound up in me. Alas! the fierce rakshasas would
 have fallen upon her in her loneliness, bit into her soft
 throat and drunk of her blood. Deprived of my
 presence and protection, in the cruel grip of the
 35 monsters, the boundless forests but deepening her loneli-
 ness, she would have cast her frightened glances all
 around; and seeing us not, would have cried out
 piteously. Lakshmana! at this very spot, on the
 banks of the Godaveri, I have spent hours of indes-
 40 cribable bliss with Seeta, lost to everything else. The
 tyrant memory would marshal them before me but too
 faithfully. This place is dreary and repulsive to me;
 but then it was unspeakably dear. My heart was

tall with pride that no man loved as I love Seeta and that I was matchless in the art of winning the 45 soul of a woman ; but, Seeta humbled my spirit in these very points. At Ayodhya we lived in the midst of kin and friends and could not drink free of the cup of pleasure ; but, here, in these lonely forests, with no restraint upon us, we gave full reins to our heart's 50 desires.

"One day, we played about the waters of the Godaveri for long hours ; I was fatigued somewhat and sought to regain the bank. Good fords there were none ; I espied a block of rock at last and meant to scramble up that 55 way. Seeta read my intentions from my looks and, bent upon fatiguing me still more, got upon the slab before me. Then she blocked my way in all directions and dashed streams of water on my face, clapping her hands in gleeful laughter to see that I was repulsed every time. 60 An utter stranger till then to defeat in any form, I hung my head in shame. She has often heard you speak in praise of me ; so, she came to you and said in mock humility 'Mighty heroes you are ; you have but to wish for anything and it is yours ; you are the crown 65 of creation. What am I before you ? A poor, weak and ignorant woman. You are ever abroad, a-hunting and fighting ; but, our world is limited to the four walls of our rooms. Were you ever known to fail in your plans ? Well, your brother was defeated by me to-day ; but I can 70 in no way account for it.' Have you forgot it ?

"This Godaveri, the most sacred of rivers, is very dear to my beloved. Would she have come here ? But, she was never used to wander hither without me. Would she, with her face like the lotus and eyes like its 75 petals, have gone somewhere else to gather those flowers ? Yet, she would not go alone. Countless birds

warble sweetly in this flower-crowned grove ; perhaps she might be hereabouts. Not so ; she is too timid to
 80 come her alone. You sun ! you are an eternal witness to the good and evil deeds of all creatures and their words, true and false ; where has my 'beloved gone ? Has some one forced her away ? I am quivering with the agony of grief ; speak straight. You Vayu ! there
 85 is nothing in all the worlds you know not. Is my wife a prisoner in the hands of some one or dead or lost in the woods ? Speak true." Thus, beside himself with grief, weak and exhausted, he raved on senseless ; where-
 at Lakshmana could not contain his sorrow. But, it
 90 was utterly impolitic, nay, dangerous, to betray his feelings then. So, he steadied himself with a mighty effort and said "Brother ! what has become of all the noble excellences inborn in you ? Enough of grief ; take heart ; let us search these woods again. Great minds
 95 and strong never give way to despair under the direst calamities". But Rama turned a deaf ear to the consolations of Lakshmana of boundless fortitude ; he abandoned himself to his grief, lost heart and began to lament afresh.

CHAPTER LXIV.

RAMA SEARCHES FOR SEETA.



AGHUNATHA called out to Lakshmana in plaintive tones and said "Go hence to the Godaveri as quick as thought and ascertain if Seeta has gone there to gather flowers." Lakshmana did so and reported that he searched for her at all the fords and called out often ; but could not find out where she had gone. Then, Rama went himself to the river and

asked her "Noble lady Godaveri! tell me where Seeta 10
has gone." But, she and everything in the forest would
not inform him of Seeta's perilous situation, mortally
afraid of Ravana as they were. Yet, they turned to the
river-goddess and said "It is wicked on our part to keep
from Rama the miserable plight of Seeta, seeing how he 15
suffers. Delay not." But, the terrible form of Ravana
and his cruel deeds struck fear into her heart and kept
her speechless. Raghava, who had strong hopes that
she would help him in finding out Seeta, now entirely
abandoned himself to despair and cried "Lakshmana! 20
this Godaveri would not reply too. How shall I
acquaint the parents of Seeta with this dreadful news?
Where has she gone, my Janaki, whose sweet words
gave me courage to bear up under the dangers and
privations of the forest life and content myself with 25
the poor fare it supplies? Reft of kin, friends and wife,
each moment of the night would be an eternity of
torture to me. I will search through the Mandakini,
Janasthana, the Prasavana and all other places till I
come upon her. Stay, these mighty beasts glance at me 30
often as if they desired to convey through signs some
news of her."

Then, he turned to the animals and cried amidst
blinding tears, "Friends! saw you Seeta?" At once,
they sprang up, turned their eyes to the sky, ran to the 35
south and looked back every now and then towards the
princes. Lakshmana quickly gathered their meaning
and said "Brother! no sooner do these creatures hear
you say 'Where is Seeta?' than they spring up and run
pointing to the earth, the south and the sky. Some 40
one has carried away Seeta along the sky towards the
south. So, let us proceed to search the south-west
where the rakshasas dwell. We might come upon Seeta

or hit upon some clue to find her.” Rama approved
 45 of it and they took their way to the south, keeping
 up a careful search all the while.

They talked of her on the way and very soon came
 upon the flowers that had dropped from her hair on the
 ground. The sight roused the slumbering grief of Rama
 55 and he cried “Lakshmana! see, doubtless these are the
 very flowers I gathered for her from the woods so fondly.
 Now, we have a clue to find her out; we will not return
 without her. The sun preserves them from fading,
 thanks to his affection for me; the wind keeps them from
 55 being scattered far; and the earth guards them from
 being covered up.” He rejoiced thereat and cried out
 to the Prasravana hill, lined with torrents “Best of
 mountains! saw you my beloved of peerless beauty?”
 But, his words were echoed back to him as a reply. He
 60 was filled with rage to see that it replied him not, but
 added insult to injury by mocking his grief. Like an
 angry lion looking at some low reptile, he cast burning
 glances at it and roared “This moment you bring
 me Seeta, lovely as a statue of gold; else, I shiver you
 65 to atoms.” Yet the hill managed to convey a reply by
 its echo of having seen Seeta; for, the fear of Ravana
 kept it tongue-tied. This redoubled his fury and he
 glanced around with fiery looks and cried “Miserable
 wretch! my shafts shall reduce you to ashes. I will
 70 make it a howling wilderness here; devoid of grass, herb
 or tree. Lakshmana! this river knows where Seeta is
 gone and would not tell me. Well, I give her only a
 moment to speak out; if she persists in her obstinacy,
 I scorch her up”. But, fortunately for all, his eyes
 75 fell upon a large footprint and many small ones by its
 side. They inferred from this that, chased by the
 rakshasas, Seeta ran towards the asrama in fear; she

tried to escape them and rushed here and there. Hard by lay a bow, quivers and a chariot, all shattered to pieces. Fear filled his heart as he called out to Lakshmana and 80 cried "Behold yon garlands, necklets and the pieces of gold leaves that have been shed from the ornaments worn by Seeta. Blood-drops lie thick all around like gold dust. So, a number of rakshasas have fallen upon her and cut her to pieces. Two rakshasas had a dreadful 85 fight here over her. Whose is this huge bow decked with gold and ropes of pearls, now shattered to pieces? Whose is this armour of gold, chased with gems and shining like the morning sun, now broken to bits? Whose is this snow-white umbrella with its hun- 90 dred ribs and fringes of pearl, now shivered to atoms? To whom do these mules belong that, cased in golden armour, lie dead around us with pisacha-faces and huge terrible bulk? This war-chariot blazing like fire is now a shapeless mass; the flag thereon proclaims it as that 95 of a general. These gold-banded arrows, long and large as the axles of chariots, are scattered about with broken points; who shot them? These quivers full of arrows are riven to pieces. Whose charioteer is this, who lies dead, his hands yet grasping the whip and the reins? 100 Behold those two rakshasas with chamaras in their hands and decked with turbans and ear-rings; whom did they serve? This footprint is a man's, for, it does not press heavily in front; it is crooked and hence is that of a rakshasa. The enmity between them and 105 myself has now grown a million times bitter. I *will* exterminate them. These cruel demons have carried her away or eaten her up or slain her.

"The god of dharma failed to protect her when the rakshasas insulted her in this lonely forest." The 110 very Regents of the spheres dare not displease me;

then, why not save her? Lakshmana! know you
 the reason of it? It matters not if you are endowed
 with the power of evolving, preserving and destroying
 115 the infinite worlds; if you but give room for pity and
 gentleness, every created object will, 'in ignorance of
 your worth, slight you; this is the way of the world.
 Behold! I affect gentleness and restraint of the senses,
 but for the well-being of all; and they take me for
 120 a slight insignificant impotent thing and brush me
 aside in contempt. Compassion is said to be a noble
 virtue; yet it is a vice in me. Has it come to this that
 the gods should insult me and allow Seeta to be carried
 away? What avails this compassion? I have vowed
 125 to destroy the rakshasa brood and have transformed
 the vice of compassion into the virtue of wrath. As
 the sun rises on the horizon in all his blinding glory,
 and throws into the shade the cool rays of the moon, I
 will suppress in me mercy, humility and other virtues,
 130 but to proclaim my might and energy the better. It
 bodes no good to yakshas, gandharvas, pisachas, kin-
 naras, rakshasas or men. My shafts shall blot out the
 sky and depopulate the three worlds. The planets, the
 moon, Agni, Vayu and the sun shall not move; I will
 135 deprive them of their power and life and reduce them
 to utter nothing. I will shatter the mountains and
 let loose chaos and ruin on the three worlds with their
 mountains and rivers. The Regents shall feel but too
 heavily the weight of my arm should they fail to bring
 140 back Seeta to me this instant safe and sound. Not a
 bird, not a fly shall be seen anywhere. My arrows
 shall cruelly torture every creature in this world,
 exterminate the beasts, change the very properties of
 'things' and hold the universe in terror. Pisacha or
 145 rakshasa, the very name shall be lost for all time.

Let them try to stand before the arrows winged with my wrath—gods, daityas, pisachas, rakshasas or yakshas. I will make mince-meat of them and turn the worlds into one vast field of the dead. It matters not if Seeta be^{*}carried away or slain; the Regents 150 shall place her before me this instant just as she was when I left her or I will wipe the very worlds out of existence, and reduce to utter nothing the creatures therein.” His face blazed with wrath; his eyes flashed flames; he grasped his mighty bow, placed a terrible 155 arrow on the string that shone like the Rod of time or a great serpent, and, utterly transported with rage like the Fire of Time that consumes the worlds at the pralaya, roared out, “Lakshmana! was any one known to stay the march of age, death, time or Fate? 160 Even so my wrath. Seeta shall be brought to me this instant •with the very smile on her lips as when she said to me ‘Catch this deer for me;’ else, I devastate this universe. Surely no one will blame me for it. Seeta is higher than myself in that she comes 165 not of mortal womb; she is equal to me in that she is the daughter of the heroic Janaka. What care I for others when my heart is sore with grief at her loss?”

CHAPTER LXV.

LAKSHMANA CONSOLES RAMA.

LIKE the Samvartaka fire, or Rudra at the time of pralaya, Rama set himself to destroy the universe, placed an arrow on the string and, with 5 hot sighs, hesitated a little before he discharged it. “Alas!” said Lakshmana to himself “never have I seen him in such a rage. The worlds are on the

brink of destruction. What shall I do ?” With a face
10 white with terror, he folded his hands and said
“Brother! gentle ever, of stern self-control and bent
upon the welfare of all beings, it becomes you not to
change your nature and give way to wrath. The above
excellences, and noble glory besides, are as natural to
15 you as cool radiance to the moon, or dazzling
brilliance to the sun, or motion to Vayu, or patient
forbearance to the Earth. Say not ‘All this came
of my being so humble and modest. How shall I
get back Seeta if I send not my wrath before me? Who
20 shall care for me or for my excellences?’ There is but
a single car yonder; we see the footprints of only one;
it is plain that your enemy is not more; then it is all
unjust of you to destroy the *worlds* for it. We know
not who came here in this car; the hoofs of mules and
25 wheels have bit deep into the ground; blood-drops are
scattered all around. Who was the solitary fighter
here? Whom did he fight with? We see no signs of
many having been here. So, it is all unjust to destroy
the worlds for the crime of one. Punishment should
30 ever be just and moderate in the hands of kings;
gentleness and restraint should ever go before them.
Besides, you are the stay and support of all creatures;
they look up to you as their refuge. Think not that
the gods have wantonly insulted you. Find me any
35 one who thinks it just that you should lose Seeta and
suffer so. Rivers, oceans, mountains, devas, gandharvas
and danavas dare not dream of displeasing you; the
sacrificial priests are powerless to harm him who takes
upon himself the vow of sacrifice. Let us arm our-
40 selves and search carefully through the oceans, moun-
tains, forests, frightful caves, rivers, lotus-pools and
the worlds of the gods and gandharvas; let us vent

our wrath upon the Regents of the Quarters if they render not Seeta back to us. Let us try our best to recover her by just and peaceful means; failing which, our gold-chased shafts shall annihilate them.” 45

CHAPTER LXVI.

LAKSHMANA CONSOLES RAMA—(continued.)

THUS entreated and consoled, Rama was yet unable to shake off his sorrow and wailed like a helpless waif; utterly bewildered, he behaved like one reft of his senses; whereat Lakshmana was sore grieved. He threw himself at his feet and entreated him afresh to take heart. “The celestial hierarchies banded themselves of yore to churn the Ocean of milk and extracted amrita from it; even so, the emperor Dasaratha underwent a long and severe course of fasts, penances, vows, gifts, horse-sacrifice, putrakameshti yagas and yagnas, all to call you his son. In his own person he achieved singly what the countless hosts of devas toiled to accomplish; mantraṣ, materials, rituals, nothing was amiss and no resource was left untapped. The amrita gave life and happiness to the worlds above and below; and all creation rejoice at your coming down on earth. Bharata has brought us news that the king was so much wrapped in you and your noble perfections that he could not live away from you, but sought his seat of bliss among the Immortals. Fortitude, courage and serenity are inborn in you, the brightest scion of the race of Ikshwaku. It is vain to expect ordinary mortals to face such miseries and sorrows if *you* do not set them the example. Whom shall the creation take refuge in, if your grief drives you on to consume the worlds? It is the way of the world that great calamities should cross the path of our life.” 5 10 15 20 25

Once upon a time the emperor Nahusha was called to the throne of Indra. He conceived an unholy passion for

30 Indrani and proceeded to her apartments in a palanquin
 borne upon the shoulders of the Seven Rishis. Blinded
 with lust, he prodded with his feet Agastya, the shortest of
 the group, who could not keep pace with the rest. 'Down
 you fall' cried the sage, 'as a huge serpent and unwieldy;
 35 and for ages past count did he writhe in that hideous
 body. Long after, his son Yayati ascended to the world of
 the gods through the might of a stainless life and good.
 Indra grew jealous of him and cunningly asked 'Whom do
 you count the best and noblest in your empire?' Now
 Yayati was the soul of truth and replied 'Myself.' 'Then'
 40 cried Indra 'you have polluted yourself with the sin of
 self-glorification and have no place among the Sons of
 Light,' and hurled him down headlong. Again, the hun-
 dred sons of Maharshi Vasishtha, the guru of our race, were
 reduced to ashes in a second by the fire of Visvamitra's
 45 wrath. Why, have you not told me time and oft, that the
 very Goddess of Earth quakes in affright, and she the con-
 sort of Maha-vishnu and the mother of the universe? The
 Sun and the Moon are the eternal witnesses of all activities;
 they bestow life and light on all beings; they run the
 50 worlds in their capacity of the visible symbols of Endless
 Time; yet they are not free from the grip of Rahu and
 Ketu. Mandhata, Nala and other mighty souls were power-
 less to go against the plan of the Supreme One who sits in
 the innermost depths of the hearts of all beings. We are
 55 taught that Indra and his gods are subject to the Law of
 Karma and but reap as they sow; now then, it behoves you
 not to grieve.

Should you give way to sorrow like an ordinary mortal,
 if Seeta be spirited away or slain, and you, the prince of
 60 heroes? Great souls like yourself, to whom the heart of
 things is no mystery, do not lose control over themselves
 under the stress of cruel misfortune, but preserve their
 calmness and serenity unruffled. We should face the
 chances of life with minds unclouded by sorrow. The
 65 wise adapt this course and foresee coming events and the

mysteries thereof. Our deeds in past lives take no visible shape for us ; we cannot directly perceive their strength and weakness ; but, we would not be called on to reap their results if we had not created the causes thereof. Your present misfortunes, are but the outcome of your past karma ; and is it in any way reasonable that you should bewail your fate ? Have I not learnt this from yourself ? Well do I know that Brihaspati himself would not dream of offering you any advice. The very gods despair of guessing the bounds of your intelligence and wisdom. I but humbly submitted this, since your wisdom was somewhat clouded by your grief at having lost Seeta. It is all unjust to destroy the gandharvas, yakshas, kinnaras and other celestial heirarchies, for, they are the outcome of the satwika evolution ; it is not right to destroy the mortal worlds, for, they are the abode of brahmanas, maharshis and knowers of Brahman ; yet you have only to will and the myriad worlds are reduced to chaos. Recall to your memory the object of your incarnation in the line of Ikshwaku and take full measures to destroy our enemy. What do you gain by annihilating the countless worlds when only one solitary individual in them has offended you ? We shall come upon that sinful wretch anyhow and he shall pay for it with his life."

CHAPTER LXVII.

RAMA MEETS JATAYU.

RAMA was older in years than Lakshmana ; he was the giver of light and wisdom to all ; yet, the advice of his brother was eminently reasonable and sound. Now, he was one to whom the bright side of everything appealed foremost ; so, he accepted the suggestion of his brother, calmed his boiling rage and exclaimed as he lent on his bow " What shall we do now ? Where shall we seek next ? How shall we come upon her ? " To which answered

Lakshmana. " Brother ! let us go again most carefully through this Jānasthana, the constant resort of the
 15 rakshasas. It is full of groves, arbours, caves, chasms, dales, haunts of kinnaras and gandharvas and many a secret hiding-place besides. Let us search every inch of it. As lordly mountains, that fierce gales shake not, great intellects like yourself are not affected in the least
 20 by danger or adversity."

Then, as they proceeded through the woods, keeping up a strict search all around, they saw, a little to the south of the field of battle, a bird of huge bulk lie upon the ground weltering in his blood. At once, Ramā
 25 turned to Lakshmana and said " This miserable rakshasa has gorged himself with the flesh of my Seeta and, smeared with her blood, lies here to sleep it off. He has turned himself into a vulture on seeing us. This very instant shall he fall a prey to my blazing arrows." He fitted a
 30 sharp and cruel shaft to the string and sprang towards the bird, the earth trembling under the weight of his wrath. Then, the vulture wailed a piteous reply, vomiting foam and blood the while, "Ravana, the wicked rakshasa, has reft me of my life and of her whom I sought to defend with
 35 it ; I guess you seek her in this forest like some plant of wonderful occult properties. I saw him carry her away when you and Lakshmana were not there to prevent it. I barred his path and destroyed his bow, arrows, war-chariot, and driver. He profited by my fatigue and
 40 weakness to hew off my wings and legs and bore away Seeta along the sky. Ravana has done for me this time ; and I entreat you not to kill me afresh."

This redoubled the grief of Rama ; he flung away his bow, clasped Jatayu to his breast and rolled on the
 45 earth in the agony of despair, the lonely woods echoing back the piteous lamentations of the brothers. No one ever came that way ; nor was there any path that led beyond it ; there was no room for more than one to walk through it. And there lay Jatayu helpless and mortally wounded

in that remote and desolate spot. "Alas !" cried Rama 50
 "the crown was suddenly snatched from my grasp. I
 was not even allowed to be a beggar in my kingdom,
 but was driven to the dreary woods. Even there, I
 might have forgotten my griefs in the company of those
 near and dear to me. I was denied that solace ; now, 55
 Seeta is lost to me. Yet, friends and kin would have
 enabled me to forget the affliction ; that too I was not to
 have, for, I have brought death upon Jatayu. These
 never-ceasing billows of grief and misfortune, one mightier
 than the other, dash against me and I am almost tempted 60
 to conclude that, should I leap into the raging fire, my
 evil fate would burn it too. Who knows but it might end
 in tearing you away from my side, you, my other self as
 it were ? The very oceans would dry up, should I seek
 their depths to drown myself therein and end my sorrows. 65
 The countless worlds cannot produce another as unfortu-
 nate and miserable as myself. Saw any one the like of
 me that is hopelessly entangled in the toils of misery ?
 Behold, this Jatayu here is the dearest friend of our sire !
 We hold him in respect, as though he were our father ; 70
 old beyond mortal count, yet, he ever watched over our
 safety ; and my evil fortune has dragged him to a horrible
 death." Thus lamenting many a wise, did he gently stroke
 the limbs of the dying Jatayu. In fact, the vulture king
 was dearer to the heart of Rama than Dasaratha himself ; 75
 so, he clasped him to his breast and, with a hoarse cry of
 'Where is Seeta, my beloved ?', fell on the earth in a
 dead faint.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

JATAYU'S REWARD.

HE came back to himself after a while and, turning to
 his beloved friend Lakshmana, said "My dear ! this
 bird has fought a terrible battle with Ravana and has given
 his life to defend my wife. The life-breaths flicker in him

5 yet ; his voice sinks to a whisper ; he is passing on
 through the gates of Death. Jatayu ! I entreat you to
 describe to me what has become of Seeta and what cruel
 calamity has befallen you, if you could but gather strength
 to speak. Why should Ravana abduct Seeṭa ? How have
 10 I injured him ? How did she look at the time ? What
 did she say then ? Give me an idea of the form, features,
 power and exploits of that rakshasa. Where does he
 abide ?" Then replied Jatayu in weak and piteous accents,
 " Rama ! that rakshasa king created out of his magic a
 15 dark cloud and terrible winds, enveloped Seeta therein and
 bore her away through the sky. He took advantage of my
 fatigue during the fight to hew my pinions and carry her
 away towards the south. The life-breaths are rushing out
 of my mouth in the agonies of death ; my eyes darken
 20 and are glazed ; the trees wear a golden look and are
 crowned with long hair. Ravana kidnapped Seeta in the
 muhoorta named Vinda ; he knew not that the owner re-
 covers very soon the object he had lost, thanks to the occult
 influence of the moment. Like a fish that swallows
 25 the hook, that rakshasa has but carried his Fate along with
 him in the guise of Seeta. Grieve not for her. You will
 slay Ravana and enjoy long ages of happiness in the com-
 pany of Seeta." And from the mouth of Jatayu, that spoke
 till then clearly and coherently, flowed a torrent of blood
 30 and flesh. He essayed to say something more ; but,
 Death had his grip upon him and he breathed his last
 saying 'The son of Visravas and brother of Kubera.'
 'Proceed, proceed' cried Rama in earnest entreaty ; but,
 the life-breaths had abandoned the frame of the true-
 35 hearted bird. Alas ! he laid his head on the ground, threw
 his limbs about and passed on to the other side of death.
 Blood rushed to his eyes as he fell headlong and lay like
 a huge mountain-peak. The woeful sight roused a host
 of conflicting emotions and sorrows in the breast of Rama
 40 and he cried " Lakshmana ! This, our friend, had abode
 in this Dandaka forest for thousands of years, in peace and

happiness, albeit the haunt of cruel rakshasas ; and there he met his death at the hands of one of them. Of a length of life that vanishes into the dim past, he was fated to die now. Alas ! irresistibile is the march of Time. Behold, 45
 Lakshmana ! Ravana was bearing her away when this bird fought with the wretch to recover my Seeta from his hands, yea, to the very last. Illimitable indeed is the obligation he has laid me under. I obeyed my father's behests and relinquished the kingdom that was mine ; but, my friend 50
 here gave up of his own accord the kingdom he had ruled for countless ages. My empire of Kosala cannot compare with his. Many claim a title to the throne along with me ; but he was the sole and undisputed monarch of these wide forests. The king of the feathered creation, he wore 55
 the crown that had descended to him from a thousand ancestors and gave up his life in my service. Now that our sire is no more, I reckoned upon living with our feathered friend here and put behind me all grief and sorrow. And *he* too has chosen to abandon me. Every 60
 class of creation holds within it types of goodness, virtue and self-sacrifice. The loss of Seeta counts nowhere by the side of this unspeakable calamity. This lord of birds has a claim upon our reverence, upon our service, as much as king Dasaratha from whose loins we have sprung. 65
 Hence, we should honor him with the same funeral ceremonies as we performed for the emperor. Build me a magnificent pyre of wood while I produce fire by attrition ; for, I would even offer the rites of cremation to Jatayu who gave his life for me and mine." 70

It was accordingly done ; Rama stood by the pyre and, addressing Jatayu, exclaimed " Lord of birds, most puissant ! through the might of receiving your cremation at *my* hands, rise up to the Worlds of Glory, where sit the householders ever busy with yagnas and yagas, the vana- 75
 prasthas (hermits) who carry on their tapas in the midst of five Fires, the sanyasis whose feet turn not back from the Path of Renunciation and life-long celibates that have

cast behind them the hollow pleasures and joys of
 80 the world." He lifted the body all reverently on to the
 pyre, ignited it with the appropriate mantras and finished by
 reciting the *Yamyā* sooktas calling upon the pitri-devas to
 lead the defunct to the Worlds of Light. Then, with a
 heavy heart, the brothers dived into the forest, and slew
 85 some large deer; purifying themselves with a bath in
 the Godaveri, they offered libations of water to Jatayu.
 Lastly, they spread the sacred kusa grass upon the eme-
 rald sward and duly placed thereon balls of cooked
 flesh.

90 That monarch of birds fought with Ravana to recover
 Seeta and gave his life in the attempt. Rama, like unto
 the maharshis, performed for him the rites of cremation and
 raised him aloft to the highest worlds as a reward of his
 unparalleled merit.

95 Thus the brothers conducted the funeral obsequies of
 Jatayu as earnestly and fervently as if he was the father
 that gave them birth; they had supreme faith in his words
 "You will not fail to recover Seeta"; and, resolved to spare
 no efforts to get at her, they plunged into the depths of the
 100 dark woods like Vishnu and Indra.

CHAPTER LXIX.

KABANDHA.

THEY set their faces to the south-west and proceeded
 on and on until they came upon a path dim and dark
 with thick trees, bushes, furze and creepers; it was fear-
 ful to the eye and hard to tread; the feet of man had never
 5 invaded it. The princes very swiftly crossed that part of
 Dandaka teeming with lions, tigers, bears and other fierce
 beasts of prey, and entered Krauncharanya, another wood
 that lay three krosas from Janasthana. At a distance it gave
 one the idea of rain-charged clouds of diverse hue piled
 10 in strange confusion. • Blown flowers met the eye every-

where, as if the woods laughed in uncontrollable glee. Beasts and birds of infinite variety ranged the woods in utter fearlessness. The princes rested themselves now and then under the thick foliage of mighty trees and travelled on, keeping a careful search for Seeta the while. 15

They then proceeded due east for another three krosas, crossed the Krauncharanya and came upon another wood that lay between it and Matangasrama. It abounded with lofty trees and fierce beasts and birds and was hard to traverse. On their way, they came upon a huge 20 cave that seemed to lead to the very bowels of the earth. Unbroken darkness reigned in it ever. Hard by the princes espied a giantess of hideous features. Vast of bulk even as a mountain, with a swelling abdomen that put to shame huge war-drums, with teeth and fangs sharp as needles, with skin tough and scaly, she was a sight that turned 25 the hearts of all beings to water. With tousled hair and hideously open mouth, she feasted her fill upon the wild beasts of the forest that fell an easy prey to her. At the sight of the brothers, she ran at them with frightful roars, 30 and, clasping in her foul embrace Lakshmana that walked in front, roared out "Come, let us range these woods in endless, joy. They call me Ayomukhi (Iron-face). Know you not that you have found favour in my eyes as the result of untold merit in your past births? Strange, my heart 35 turns to you in fond love. Let us pass our lives in pleasure and sport on mountain-peaks and soft shoals of sand." Whereat Lakshmana waxed wroth, whipped out his sword and sliced off her ears, nose and breasts. With hideous roars of pain and rage, she vanished back where 40 she came from.

Then, Rama and Lakshmana dived into the darker and more dangerous depths of the forest, when Lakshmana, of immeasurable strength, pure heart and clean body, turned to Rama and spoke over joined palms of reverence 45 "Brother! my right arm throbs frequently; my heart trembles with unaccountable dread; I see many an evil

portent that indicates some great misfortune about to overtake us. So, let us proceed most carefully. Lo!

50 yon bird, the vanjula, cries most shrilly that we would defeat our foes in the near future." Thus conversing, they proceeded to make a cautious search in the woods around, when they heard a dreadful sound as if somebody was shattering that forest to pieces; a fierce gale rose

55 and blew as if on the Day of dissolution; and earth and sky quaked in affright thereat. They endeavoured to ascertain where it proceeded from, when they beheld a rakshasa stand in the midst of a thicket a long way off. His huge stomach and hideous features caught their eye afar. A

60 nearer view told them that there was no head upon his shoulders; a huge mouth yawned from his stomach; long, sharp hair lay thick over his body; his bulk resembled a dark cloud and his voice, the roaring thereof; a huge, tawny eye burnt in his breast like a tongue of fire.

65 With long and sharp teeth, he licked his hanging lips now and then as he was engaged in his ceaseless task of crunching to powder, lions, tigers, elephants, bears, deer, birds and other creatures. His arms were a yojana in length. He spread them wide and gradually drove towards

70 his huge mouth the beasts and birds between.

The princes caught sight of the Rakshasa, a *krosa* off as he stood towering across their path. Then that Kabandha (the headless trunk) drew towards himself the brothers along with the other animals within his reach.

75 Armed with sword and bow, resplendent with energy and strength, yet, Rama and Lakshmana allowed themselves to be overpowered. Rama, the elder of the two, was of matchless prowess and unfathomable courage and was not in the least affected. But, Lakshmana lost his nerve, as

80 his strength and courage were not yet fully matured. He turned a woeful face to Rama and cried "Brother! this cruel rakshasa has me in his grip. Leave me to my fate and seek the safety of your precious self. 'Blessed' am I to offer my worthless life as a sacrifice to save yours. You

are sure to come upon Seeta and that very soon. If I 85
 have any prayer to make, it is but that you would deign
 to think of me when you are on the glorious throne of
 your ancestors and rule your people well and wisely." To
 which Rama, "Child ! fear not. Would you forget that
 you are the flower of valour ? Such as you never lose 90
 heart when the strokes of adversity shake them to the
 very depths." The cruel rakshasa roughly broke upon
 his consolations and cried " Who be ye with broad and
 mighty shoulders ? How have you drifted thither, but to
 fall into my power ? What would you have ? You have 95
 •tumbled into my mouth who waits for you here tortured
 by hunger ; here you part from life."

Rama glanced at the wan countenance of his brother
 and said with a sigh " Robbed of my inheritance, driven to
 the wild forests, my wife abducted by a nameless wretch, 100
 myself in the deepest depths of woe and misery—are not
 these enough to wring one poor heart ? But this is a
 crueller stroke and threatens the loss of our lives.
 Wonderful it is to see *ourselves* in the grip of calamity that
 makes short work of our wits. Immeasurable, inconceiva- 105
 ble ; awful is the might of Time. None can stand up against
 it. Every created object is as wax in its hands. Heroes,
 sages and warriors stern and strong, adepts in the art of
 war—human, divine and infernal—yet go down before it
 to destruction as as a roaring torrent gradually cuts into a 110
 bridge of sand."

But Lakshmana would not shake off the dread and
 despondency that was upon him, though exhorted by his
 brother of peerless might and fame. Then Rama recovered
 his natural courage, resourcefulness and keen intellect. 115



CHAPTER LXX.
DEATH OF KABANDHA.

THE monster observed that the princes affected to tremble with fear as they lay in his grasp and cried "Kind Fate has sent you here to appease my dreadful hunger. Why stand you there and gaze upon me open-mouthed as if you are clean demented? Yet you look like the scions of a royal house." Then, Lakshmana pulled himself up with a mighty effort, and, out of the grief that filled his heart, he spake in accents mild and apt. "Let us hew down his mighty arms ere he makes an end of us. This wretch, with his mountainous bulk and frightful features, is swollen with pride and crushes to death all living things hereabouts; and he would make no exceptions of us. Countless animals are brought up to be sacrificed in the various yagas; but the less important are generally taken round the sacrificial altar and set free. . Even so, it is cruel in the extreme to take the life of this poor wretch who is powerless to move about nor defend himself. Well, let us but deprive him of his arms."

As they were discussing their plan, the rakshasa waxed wroth, opened his frightful jaws and set about to draw them in. At once, the princes cut down his arms to the very roots, one on each side. He roared with pain and impotent fury like huge thunder-clouds and fell headlong, so that the earth, the sky and the quarters shook in affright as it were. Utterly powerless and helpless, now that he had been deprived of his huge arms that formed his very life, he was drenched with his own blood and stood before the princes trembling and cowed. At last he ventured to ask "Who may you be?" Whereat Lakshmana answered him "This one here is a prince of the house of Ikshwaku. Fame knows him as Rama. I come next to him and Lakshmana am I named. During our sojourn in these wild forests, a wicked rakshasa abducted the lady of this Raghunatha of godly might. And

her we seek even here. But, who are you ? What makes 35
 you roam these frightful wilds with your mouth in your
 stomach ? With broken feet, you grovel and writhe
 upon the ground ". All at once there flashed across the
 giant's brain the words that Indra had spoken to him of
 yore ; he gazed upon the princes with joyful eyes and cried 40
 "Noblest of men ! I lay myself at your feet. I hope you
 had a pleasant journey and safe hither. Thrice-fortunate
 am I to have a sight of your blessed selves. These huge
 unwieldy arms of mine have been hewed away by you,
 these cruel fetters. A priceless service you have rendered 45
 • me. Now hear me relate how I have been burdened with
 this frightful body.

CHAPTER LXXI.

A LEAF FROM KABANDHA'S PAST.

“ O NCE in the far past I was gifted with a form of
 surpassing beauty like unto the moon or the sun
 or Indra himself. The three worlds knew it right well. But,
 I exchanged that for another form of terror and baited
 the rishis and the ascetics. One day, a maharshi by name 5
 Sthoolasiras was wending his way in the forest in quest of
 food, when I sprang upon him all unawares and snatched
 away the provisions he was carrying. He turned upon
 me in a blaze of tury and cried ‘ Retain for all time the
 hideous form you wear now. All creation shall shun and 10
 curse you therefor ’. But, I fell at his feet and prayed
 ‘ Lord ! temper your just wrath with sweet mercy ; extend
 your forgiveness to me and let this curse of yours die
 somewhere in the future ’. To which he replied all gra-
 ciously, ‘ That shall be when Raghunatha hews down your 15
 league-long arms and cremates your remains in the wild
 forest ; your form of beauty shall come to you again and
 bliss untold shall be yours ’. Danu's son am I, blessed in
 every thing that the heart could desire.

expedition, halt, diplomacy and seeking shelter. Victory
 and prosperity ever wait upon the monarch who
 studies them carefully and applies them at the right
 15 moment. One whose fortunes are at an ebb should
 ally himself with another so as to achieve his end. Your
 present misfortunes are a plain index of your helpless
 situation ; hence, it is all the more imperative that you
 should secure a capable ally. After deep thought over the
 20 situation I have concluded that you cannot realise your
 hopes until you seek the friendship of another who is in a
 similar predicament and seeks your help. Not far from
 here is the mount Risyamooka by the shores of the lake
 Pampa and on one of its peaks you will find Sugreeva, the
 25 monkey-king. Vali, the son of Indra, is his brother and his
 mortal foe. Hunted from the kingdom, Sugreeva hides
 himself there with none but four monkey heroes that re-
 main faithful to him. Like yourselves, he is adorned with
 noble perfections ; a mighty hero, of brilliant energy, the
 30 soul of truth, he has been carefully trained by the wise
 men of his age. Of boundless courage, profound intellect,
 skilful, fertile in resources, his strength and prowess are
 simply inconceivable. Like yourselves, adversity has
 marked him as its own. His brother wrested his crown from
 35 him and hunted him out of his kingdom. *He* is the man
 to render you every possible help in the matter of recover-
 ing your wife. You may banish all anxiety on that score.
 Our karma directs the march of events in our lives and no
 one can change it. There is no armour against the shafts
 40 of Time. Go, find him out without a moment's delay and
 let the bright God of Fire witness the union of your hearts
 and interests that you may stand by each other without guile
 or treachery. Slight him not as a rude and insignificant
 denizen of the forests that could stead you in no way, for,
 45 the monkey-world owns his sway ; a matchless hero, able
 to assume any form at will, he is the soul of gratitude ;
 above all, he stands in need of your help and you alone
 can realise his hopes. Nay, he will assist you, though you

might fail in assisting him. He is the son of Riksharajas, though born of the energy of the Sun-god. At present he hides himself through fear of Vali in the forests that border the Lake Pompa. Seek him out and strike a deathless friendship with him, with the Fire-god and your weapons to witness it. The rakshasas have no habitat in this world that he knows not. His monkey hosts will search thoroughly the mountains, rivers, caves, lakes, forests, seas and islands in every spot from here to the limits of this Solar system ; he is sure to come upon the prison-house of Seeta. His monkey heroes will scour the quarters of the globe like huge thunder-clouds. Seeta may pine in Lanka, the capital of Ravana; she may cast longing eyes towards you from the dizzy heights of mount Meru ; her sighs might rise from the deepest depths of the under-world, but he is sure to find her out ; he will strike down the rakshasas that bar his path and restore her to you. ”

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE LIBERATION OF KABANDHA—(Continued).

THUS did Kabandha, of the league-long arms, advise Rama and continue, “This path to the west takes you straight to mount Risyamooka. Behold the trees all around that bend under their golden tribute of fruits and flowers—neem, sandal, asoka, fig, banyan, apple, jack and others too numerous to mention. Honey-sweet and wholesome, you can take your fill of them as you travel. Right beyond you come upon a wood lovely as Nandana, the pleasure-garden of the Celestials, or the groves in the land of Uttarakuru. Flowers and fruits of every season are to be found there even as you have it in the garden of Chaitraratha. Streams of honey flow from every lofty tree, that, bending low under the weight of fruits, seem from afar like cloud-banks or mountain peaks. Lakshmana will keep you ever

15 supplied with nectarine fruits from their branches. Pass through countless woods, mountains and lands until you come upon lake Pampa.

20 "The ground is carpeted with soft sand, free of flints and pebbles; the banks are firm and unbroken; the fords are shallow and no moss or rank water-weeds entangle your feet; the lotus, the lily and many a lovely flower besides adorn its bosom, while swans, herons, waterfowl and frogs make sweet music to the ear. The sight of man is strange for them; they fear him not and have no idea of any harm

25 he could do them. Lakshmana will prepare you a pleasant and delicious meal from the fat birds and fish in it; and you will find it rare delight to drink of its pure waters from cups of lotus leaves. Cool and sweet, clear as silver or crystal, you will find it healthy and refreshing with the fragrance of lotuses playing over it. Many a boar from the surrounding mountain caves curiously shaped and bellowing like fierce bulls, comes down to quench its thirst at the lake. A pleasant walk in the evening on its banks would make you forget the grief that eats into your heart;

35 as the eye ranges over stately trees hung with garlands and festoons of star-like flowers and the cool and pellucid waters of Lake Pampa, adorned with many a blown lotus, lily, kalhara and indeevara. No one dares to gather them—the forest is so remote, the flowers bloom past count and the disciples of Rishi Mathanga are dreaded for the cruel

40 curses they launch at trespassers; they fade not; they drop not. The hermits frequent the spot occasionally to perform their tapas and wander through these woods in search of food. As they bent low under their heavy loads of fruits, flowers, roots and fuel on their way to the hermitage of their guru, drops of sweat fell from their limbs

45 and were transformed into lovely garlands by the cool-breezes wafted from the trees; and these fade not, thanks to the holy might of the rishis.

50 "A woman by name Sabari served them long and faithfully. Hoary with age, she stays here but to offer

her worship to you, Rama, radiant as the gods and the loadstone of the heart of every created being; and then she will shuffle off her mortal coil. On the western shore of Lake Pampa you come upon the holy abode of the rishis in a secret spot. Mount Risyamooka and the forests around are infested with elephants. But, they keep away from the asrama through the orders of Rishi Matanga. You will do well to reside for a while in that wood, more charming than Nandana, the garden of Indra; your grief will fall away from you and joy will fill your heart. 55 60

"Mount Risyamooka bounds Lake Pampa in the east. Of yore, Brahma invested it with a curious potency—he who sleeps off a night on its top and sees in his dream gold, silver or wealth of any kind, he is sure to get it after he awakes. Sinners and the wicked dare not ascend it; for, cruel rakshasas carry them away when they are asleep and tear them to pieces. Further, countless elephant-calves range its sides and the forests around, and prevent any one from approaching it. Very often, they come down to gambol and disport themselves on the shores of Pampa and you hear them far off as they trumpet in glee. Formidable bull elephants fight together and torrents of blood rain from their bodies, giving them the appearance of dark cloud-banks as they crash through the wood. They drink of the cool waters of lake Pampa and hold undisputed sway over the forests around. You will also come upon bears, leopards, wolves, deer and many a curious animal. 65 70 75

"There is a huge cave in that mountain, closed by a mighty slab. East of it you find a large pool brimming with cool and sweet water. All around it, you find fruits, roots and other articles of food in lavish abundance. Birds and Beasts of every imagined variety delight the eye. And, there abides Sugreeva with four monkey heroes; sometimes he is also found on the tops of the mountain." He gave minute directions as to the future course of their action and waited for permissions to depart. The princes 80 85

90 went up to him and took kind leave of him, securing for him
a seat on high in 'the worlds of light. "You will have your
heart wishes realised and that soon, very soon," said he
in reverent gratitude as he ascended his car.

Thus, Kabandha resumed his original shape of beauty
and, all radiant in his lustre, he turned his face towards the
95 world of the Shining Ones; and his last words were "Rama!
fail not to secure the friendship of Sugreeva."

CHAPTER LXXIV. .

THE LIBERATION OF SABARI.

THE princes travelled west along the path pointed out
by Kabandha, lined with many a tree bending under
its load of delicious fruits. That night they spent on the
mountain and the next day walked on to the western shore
5 of Pampa where stood the holy asrama of Sabari. The
lady espied them coming and albeit tottering with age and
infirmities, rose, advanced to meet them and went round
them in reverent devotion, her hoary head bent over joined
palms the while ; next, she offered them due worship with
10 water to wash their hands and feet and sip. Then Rama
addressed himself to that famed ascetic and said "Mother!
may I hope that your tapas waxes and nothing to ruffle its
calm tenor ? Have you controlled anger ? Do you observe
strict diet ? Are you keeping up the fasts, vows and
15 penances ? May I take it that joy and calm fill your heart ?
I ween that your devoted service to your gurus has borne
"golden fruit."

And to him who inquired of her welfare so kindly,
20 Sabari replied in all humility, "Lord ! verily my tapas has
borne golden fruit in that I am blessed to have a sight of
your presence; of a truth, my tapas and my service to my
gurus have, this day, repaid me a million-fold. It is to-day
I realise that I have lived to some purpose. The Lord of

all men and gods, has been pleased to seek me out even
 where I am ; and I doubt not would be raised to 25
 the supreme heavens. The accumulated sins of my past
 have fallen away from me, the moment your sweet looks
 of compassion rested upon me. The prospective sins that
 might grow out of my karma in this life have no power
 over me ; for, you are here to destroy anything and every- 30
 thing that might bar the path of your devotees to light and
 life. Thanks to the grace of my gurus that secured me
 yours, I am sure to live through eternities in your Vai-
 kuntha. You would like to know why I did not accompany
 my Teachers. You were at Chitrakoota when radiant cars 35
 bore them away to the supreme heavens. Time holds for
 them no secret—past, present or future ; they saw full well
 that it was not given me to reach your feet through yoga,
 gnana or other means ; the Lord's grace should flow to-
 word me only through the channel of my gurus, 40
 ' Rama will not fail ' said they ' to pay a visit to this holy
 spot. Render devout worship to him and Lakshmana. A
 sight of his blessed presence will raise you to the world
 where death is not nor sorrow ! Now, allow me to tell you
 that, I have gathered together some delicacies for you ever 45
 since you took your abode on mount Chitrakoota. I have
 seen to it myself that they are sweet and wholesome and I
 pray you to grace it with your acceptance."

Of low birth, yet she was a high initiate in the wisdom
 of Brahman, thanks to the supreme grace of her Teachers; 50
 and, in consequence, was dear to the heart of the Lord.
 Rama turned to her and said " Noble lady ! Danu has
 spoken to me in very high terms of the might and glory of
 the Great Ones, your teachers. I would feign see it for
 myself if you are so minded." 55

Thereupon Sabari, overjoyed at such an opportunity,
 took Rama around the wood and pointed out the objects
 of interest therein. " Behold this extensive grove of Rishi
 Matanga that gives one the idea of cloud-banks, as it
 teems with beasts and birds. Here are the holy Waters 60

brought thither by my gurus, the Wise Ones, through the power of their mantras. Yonder stand the altars facing the west dedicated to Vishnu. Here, my Teachers offered fragrant tribute of flowers every day with trembling hands and emaciated through age and fasts. Thanks to the might of their tapas, they irradiate the quarters even now with their glory. My gurus were feeble with fasts and penances; hence they used to take their bath in the waters of the seven oceans transported here by them with the speed of thought. Their dress of bark, hung on the trees hereabouts to dry, are yet wet, thanks to their having come in contact with their holy bodies. The garlands they laid with reverent devotion at the feet of the Shining Ones fade not. And so, I have taken you around this wood and described to you the wonders thereof as well as I could. Now, with your leave, I would cast off this fleshly vesture of mine ; for I would stand by the side of the Great Ones whom I have served till now with whole-souled devotion and serve them through all eternity. ”

80 The princes were mightily pleased with Sabari as she expatiated upon the greatness of her gurus, who were enshrined in the sanctuary of her heart, and exclaimed : “ Blessed are we in that it was given to us to behold these wonders.” Then Rama turned to Sabari and said “Mother!

85 right gladly do I accept from your hands these delicacies gathered by you for me from a long time. Your devotion to your gurus and your unselfish service to them has given me as much pleasure as if you entertained me right royally. Now, you may ascend to the worlds of Light

90 wherever you list.”

And Sabari built a fire cast her worn frame in it and arose from it in a resplendent body of light. Ornaments and garments of celestial beauty graced her limbs, while garlands and perfumes of heavenly fragrance held the air in thrall ; and she raised herself through the might of her tapas to the world of glory, where abode her gurus, the Great Ones.

CHAPTER LXXV.*

THE PRINCES REACH LAKE PAMPA.

WHEN Sabari had ascended to the Vaikuntha through
 her wisdom and devotion, Rama and Lakshmana
 stayed there awhile, pondering over the lives of those great
 souls. Then Rama turned to his brother by his side, whose
 heart was ever centred in his service and said "Child ! it
 was given to us to behold the holy asrama and the won- 5
 ders thereof. Peace and harmony fill the hearts of the
 deer, the tigers and the birds hereabouts. We have bathed
 in the waters of these seven oceans and offered libations
 to the manes of our ancestors. Our impurities have fallen 10
 away from us and supreme peace and gladness reign in
 my heart, from the conviction of a bright future in store for
 us ; nay, it is fast speeding its way towards us. Arise and
 lead the way to Pampa. Yonder towers mount Risyamooka ;
 and there abides in concealment Sugreeva, the 15
 son of Soorya, attended by his four devoted followers.
 Great is my eagerness to meet him, for, our hopes hinge
 upon him to recover Seeta." Lakshmana rejoiced to see
 Rama cast off his grief and pluck up courage and exclaimed
 "we cannot be too soon about it, for, I too am equally 20
 eager to see him."

Then they journeyed on from the asrama, bathed in
 the holy waters of Matanga-saras and drew near the
 shores of Pampa through woodland paths. Countless rishis
 abode thereabouts in lovely asramas. Almost hidden by 25
 trees and creepers, it brimmed over with cool, delicious
 waters. Like a rich carpet of curiously wrought colours,
 it charmed the eye, red with lotuses and kalharas, white
 in other places with kumudas and black in others with
 kuvalayas. The forests around looked like a bevy of gaily 30
 adorned ladies in their luxuriant growth of ilaka, beeja-
 poorā, dhava, karaveera, punnaga, banyan, vanjula, asoka,
 nichula, saptaparna, ketaka, atimukta and other trees in

35 fruit and blossom. Peacocks, tittibhas, arjunakas, wood-peckers, parrots and many another gay-plumed bird filled the groves with their melodious cries. And the princes took their way to the shores of the lake Pampa with a careful eye to the beauties and wonders of the wild forest scenery.

40 The cool crystal waters, the soft carpet of sand that led to the water's edge, the glad cries of the birds, the heavy fragrance of blown blossoms, the dense wood where stand many a stately tree bending under the load of flower and fruit, and the intoxicated bees humming their mad tunes, brought back to Rama's heart the memory of Seeta
45 and the grief of separation surged afresh with whelming fury. "Lakshmana!" cried he, "yonder is Risyamooka, rich with many a vein of bright ore and garbed with flower-laden trees, even as Kabandha told us. Were we not informed that the great-souled Sugreeva, the son of Risksha-
50 rajas, dwells on it? Go thou to him;" and added "brother mine! my love to Seeta has blotted out of memory the world of grief engendered of my exile from the kingdom of my forefathers; and now that she is lost to me, my hold upon life threatens to snap."

55 So he wailed, stricken with grief and passion, until he plunged into the cool waters of the lake.

Thus did Rama and Lakshmana pass many a wood, river, mountain and desert, and suffer many a privation until and they came in sight of Lake Pampa adorned with
60 diverse trees, beasts and birds.

